

KILLER ROBOTS • THE SIEGE OF GAZA

FEBRUARY 2009

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Cover Illustration: Mark Sugar

editorial

Gaza Under Siege

GAZA HAS BEEN redefined. Gaza is now synonymous with carnage, rising death tolls, destroyed schools, and city streets slick with blood. As *In These Times* went to press, the death toll of Palestinians had passed 750—219 of them children. Twelve Israelis had died, four of them by “friendly fire.”

This is not a war against Hamas rocket fire, as Israel claims. (See “Gaza in the Crosshairs,” page 30.) It is a war against a defenseless, imprisoned population. The Israeli-Hamas ceasefire that Egypt negotiated in June 2008 was largely holding. But in the five months between June and November, Gazan civilians faced a tightening siege, with shortages of food, clean water, electricity, fuel, hospital equipment and medicine—conditions severe enough for humanitarian workers to deem the situation in Gaza as catastrophic.

Israel violated the ceasefire with a Nov. 4 attack in Gaza that killed six Palestinians. On New Year’s Eve the influential Israeli daily *Ha’aretz*, reported that senior Israeli defense officials had confirmed that the government “instructed the Israel Defense Forces to prepare for the operation over six months ago, even as Israel was beginning to negotiate a ceasefire agreement with Hamas. ... [A]lthough the lull would allow Hamas to prepare for a showdown with Israel, the Israeli army needed time to prepare, as well.”

The article described the key components of Israel’s war strategy this way: “long-term preparation, careful gathering of information, secret discussions, operational deception and the misleading of the public.”

On Jan. 4, in an address to the Israeli Cabinet, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni explained the value of diplomacy this way: “The intensive diplomatic activity

of the last few days aims to alleviate the pressure for a ceasefire and to allow time for continuing the military operation in order to achieve its goals.”

The United States has succeeded in providing full diplomatic protection to Israel in the U.N. Security Council, preventing Tel Aviv from being held accountable for violating international law—specifically, prohibitions against collective punishment, against targeting civilians and against disproportionate force.

So far, council members have not had the courage to insist on a public vote on a U.N. resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire and immediate access for humanitarian support. It is likely the General Assembly will respond. But so far, Gaza cannot look to the United Nations for help.

It remains for the people of the world to respond, and they have—“Free Gaza” humanitarian ships have sailed to Gaza (although Israel blocked the group’s sixth voyage in international waters), tens of thousands have protested around the world, including inside Israel, and the independent media has continued to defy Israel’s effort to keep journalists out of Gaza.

Pressure must also be placed on President Obama. He promised to change the mindset that led to war. The Israeli assault on Gaza reflects the same mindset as the U.S. invasion against Iraq: the belief that power equals right, that terror can somehow be destroyed by war. We must urge Obama to reclaim his commitment to change.

The U.S. government has enabled this attack—by funding, protecting and arming Israel. U.S. citizens must be part of the worldwide voice demanding an immediate, unconditional ceasefire. There is no time to waste.

—By Phyllis Bennis

IN THESE TIMES

“With liberty and justice for all...”

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mixed reaction

JUST THE FACTS



0 Number of Israelis killed by Hamas rockets between July 9 and Dec. 27, 2008.

0 Number of times the *New York Times* reported that no Israelis have been killed during the 170-day ceasefire with Hamas.

765 Number of Palestinians in Gaza killed between Dec. 27, when the war started, and Jan. 8, when *In These Times* went to press.

12 Number of Israelis killed between Dec. 27 and Jan. 8.

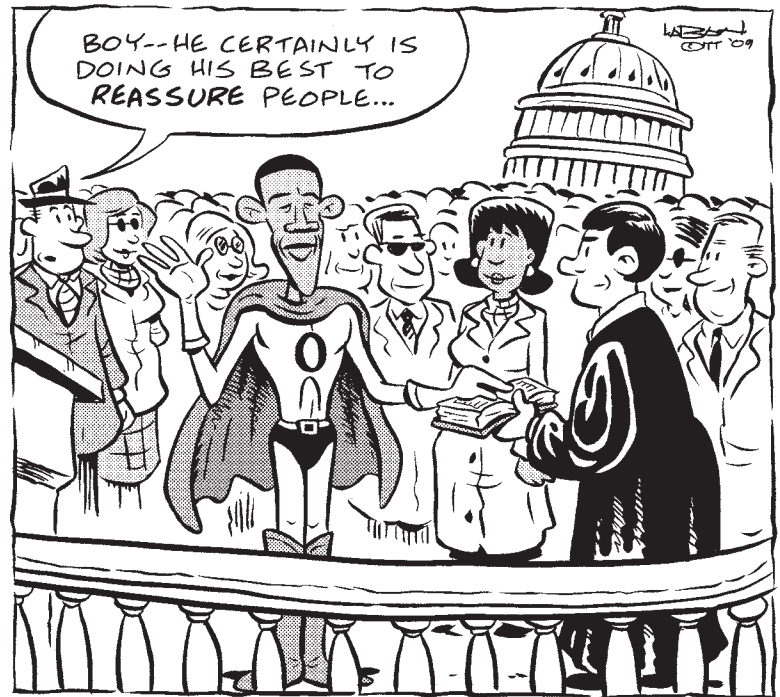
“

We will meet our challenges head-on and we will do it by rejecting the politics of mediocrity and corruption. ... I will govern as a reformer.

”

—ILLINOIS GOV. ROD BLAGOJEVICH IN HIS 2003 INAUGURAL ADDRESS

LABANARAMA BY TERRY LABAN



QUID PRO QUO

THE QUID:

Many people like their alma maters. Some donate to them. But few are as generous as Florida House Speaker Ray Sanson (R- Destin) is to his.

Despite budget cuts at public universities across the state last year, Sanson managed to steer \$25.5 million for construction to Northwest Florida State College—\$24.5 million more than the amount recommended by the State Board of Education.

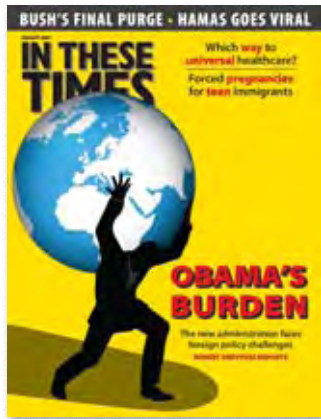
THE QUO:

Giving, of course, is its own reward. Nevertheless, Northwest Florida State College recently hired Sanson for a newly created gig as its vice president of development and planning, a position that it didn't advertise. That was unnecessary, the college's president explained to *Inside Higher Ed*, because the job is part time. Which makes its \$110,000 salary all the more impressive. On Jan. 5, after the press had kicked



up a shitstorm, Sanson gave a heartfelt speech to the state legislature, announcing his resignation from the college post. Afterward, his colleagues gave him a standing ovation.

letters



The Pay Is Nice. The Respect Is Better

It is an inspiration to workers across the country that both Christian and Muslim members of the United Food and Commercial Workers at the Tyson plant in Shelbyville, Tenn., stood together for their right to practice religion (“An Injury to Eid is an Injury to All,” December).

As a Somali immigrant and janitor in Columbus, Ohio, I understand the struggles that Muslim workers faced at the plant before they won the most important Muslim holiday as a paid day off.

Before my co-workers and I joined the Service Employees International Union, we faced religious discrimination and were unable to freely pray during our breaks. Prayer is a fundamental cornerstone to our religion—required at specific times throughout each day—but many of us are at work during mandatory prayer. We needed space and time to pray at work, so we organized, stayed united and ultimately won the right to pray without

fear of retaliation. We won the right to take breaks during required prayer time in our union contract.

Unfortunately, most workers don’t have a union and that leaves them vulnerable to discrimination. Unions go beyond securing higher pay for workers—they are a way for workers to have dignity and respect.

*Bosteyo Farah
Columbus, Ohio*

Unions go beyond securing higher pay for workers—they are a way for workers to have dignity and respect.

Cancerous Progress

Thank you, Terry Allen, for your provocative column (“Cancer: Causes and Effects,” January). High rates of cancer are a modern phenomenon. They are a product of our society’s willingness—maintained through intensive propaganda—to sacrifice a healthy quality of life for a delusive standard of “living” defined around mechanical efficiency and corporate profitability.

Devra Davis’ 2007 book, *The Secret History of the War on Cancer*, reveals the extent to which the major figures of American industrial toxicology, such as Robert Kehoe of the Kettering Laboratory, were adjuncts of corporate America. Kehoe and others were, as Davis calls them, “phantom collaborators” with the great environmental criminals of the day, using junk science as a weapon against the rest of us.

The goal was to delay the day of reckoning by concealing damning evidence, creating impossible standards of proof and always calling for more research, no matter the present risk.

Their corrupt legacy remains embedded in our scientific institutions. Allen’s article is a vital reminder that science, like the rest of human endeavor, is not neutral or transparent. It is

conditioned by hidden histories, agendas and ideologies, which, if not exposed, will continue to turn “progress” into a kind of cancer.

*Hugh Iglarsh
Skokie, Ill.*

The Kids Are Alright

I appreciated John Ireland’s account of the state of gay rights after Proposition 8 (“Prop Hate and My Family,” January). Ireland draws important connections between gay marriage and adoption, but his math makes things seem more dire than they might be.

Slightly more than 6 million Californians voted for Prop 8. That’s a lot, but in a state the size of California, that’s less than 17.3 percent of the population, far less than the “52 percent of Californians,” he claims. Indeed, nearly 15 percent of Californians are too young to vote and are far more likely to support gay rights. Let’s just hope that when they turn 18, they also turn out to vote.

*David Maynard
Via E-mail*

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The ITT List, *In These Times*’ blog, is pleased to welcome Art Levine to its roster of writers. Levine, a contributing editor of *The Washington Monthly* and author of our October 2007 cover story, “Busting the Unionbusters,” will be blogging daily on the labor movement and workers’ rights issues. Stop by www.theittlist.com for posts by Levine and ITT staff.

And InTheseTimes.com columnist Megan Tady will spotlight a disappearing species in her first column in 2009: Washington, D.C., beat reporters. Can journalism play a watchdog role as newspapers and other media outlets continue to downsize or close their D.C. bureaus? Look for Tady’s column in mid-January.



contributors

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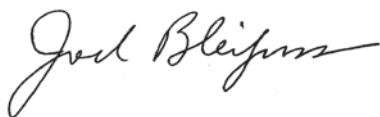
While every donation helps, we are finding that because of the recession, the number of contributions is lagging, and the average amount of each donation is considerably less than in previous years. To offset this serious decrease in revenue, *In These Times* needs the help of more readers than ever before in order to cover the rising costs of paper, printing and postage.

In These Times serves as a counterweight to a corporate media that puts profit before the needs of people. With a new Obama administration and Democratic Congress, independent news sources like *In These Times* will be more important than ever.

We know times are tough, but please encourage your friends and family to subscribe. Or sign up for our sustainer program, which allows you to donate via automatic monthly or quarterly payments. (Sign up using the envelope between pages 26 and 27.)

Many magazines shut their doors in 2008, and many more are likely to do so in 2009. *In These Times* is determined to survive its 33rd year, but we can't do it without your financial support. If you haven't recently done so, please send your contribution today.

In solidarity.



Joel Bleifuss
Editor & Publisher



BEN KENIGSBURG is a film critic at *Time Out Chicago*. A mainstay at the *Village Voice* film section from 2002 until 2006, he has also written for *Time Out New York*, the *New York Sun* and *L.A. Weekly*. He holds a bachelor's degree from Columbia University.



MANDY VAN DEVEN is a freelance writer and founder of the Feminist Review blog. Her writing has appeared in *AlterNet*, *VenusZine*, *Clamor* and *Make/Shift*. She currently resides in Calcutta, India.



CHRISTOPHER WEBER is a freelance journalist who writes frequently about the environmental movement, especially the industry that has evolved to deal with pollution. He lives on Chicago's South Side with his wife and son.

PHYLLIS BENNIS is a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies and author of *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer*. (Olive Branch, 2007).

KIM BOBO is executive director of Interfaith Worker Justice. She is the author of the recently published *Wage Theft In America* (The New Press).

ERIC STONER is a New York-based contributor to *Foreign Policy in Focus*. His articles have appeared in *The Nation*, *NACLA*, *The Independent* and The Huffington Post.



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Members of the Landless Workers Movement (MST in Portuguese) marched to occupy the Southall farm in São Gabriel in southern Brazil on April 14, 2008.

This Land Is Their Land

The Landless Workers Movement claims a big victory in southern Brazil

BY MICHAEL FOX

SÃO GABRIEL, BRAZIL—THE THREE-DAY, 30-mile march stopped before the main gate. Hundreds of exhausted farmers from Brazil's Landless Workers Movement (MST) fanned out along the fence. On the other side of the gate was the Southall Plantation, which for the last six years had been at the heart of a relentless struggle for land in southern Brazil.

Two people slammed metal farm tools into the lock, forcing it open. Marchers poured into the plantation, chanting "MST, MST!" as fireworks rocketed off in the distance. "Agrarian reform! MST! We will succeed!"

On Dec. 18, 700 families from 13 MST land occupations were awarded land

from the Brazilian government in the São Gabriel region of Brazil's southernmost state, Rio Grande do Sul.

"This is perhaps the most important victory in the region in the last 40 years, and maybe even the 40 years to come," says Cristiano Schumacher, a regional coordinator of Brazil's Movement for the Struggle for Housing, who came to support the landless movement.

The victory was unprecedented, mostly for its location. Two and a half centuries ago, the Treaty of Madrid turned present-day Rio Grande do Sul over to the Portuguese. The region of São Gabriel became the heart of the native Guaraní resistance. In 1756, joint Spanish and Portuguese forces killed Guaraní leader Sepé Tiaraju and

1,500 of his followers when they refused to leave their native lands. The Portuguese distributed the territory among the rich. Even today, "the large landowners have complete economic, territorial and political control over the whole Western region of Rio Grande do Sul," says Ana Hanauer, a state MST leader.

Over the last six years, the MST has led marches, occupations and encampments in São Gabriel, but resistance from local landowners and the police has been fierce.

"This is a region that is completely dominated by the *latifúndios* [large landowners]," says Hanauer, "We always struggled for land here, but we never achieved a settlement."

But with the economic downturn, many of the region's landowners face financial crisis, and eucalyptus pulp companies are moving in. Early last year, Alfredo Southall, owner of the Southall Plantation, agreed to sell half of his 32,000-acre ranch to Brazil's Agrarian Reform Institute (INCRA), which is charged with purchasing and distributing unproductive state land to landless farmers. The property would be turned over to 350 MST families, and another 350 would be granted similar plots of land nearby.

"We marched last year, which was really hard, and lasted 60-plus days," says Raquel, who like most MST members declined to give her last name. She settled with her husband and 4-month-old baby in Itaguaçu, São Gabriel, in December. "Now we're going to stay here in São Gabriel," she says.

But the road was not easy. Since Raquel moved into her first MST encampment four and a half years ago, she and her family have lived in temporary homes of thick black plastic tarp. They were violently removed by the Rio Grande do Sul police many times, she says. In June, the Rio Grande do Sul Justice Department called for the disbanding of the MST, labeling it "a threat to national security."

The MST believes that this victory is only the first of many in the region. With unproductive plantations losing out to the

eucalyptus pulp companies—such as the Brazilian multinational Aracruz—MST's adversaries are no longer the same.

"These transnational corporations came to the state, destroying the land and promising thousands of jobs," says Raquel's husband, Santana, "where only one worker is responsible for more than 800 acres. But 20 families could be settled on that land."

"The dispute now is agrarian reform or eucalyptus pulp monocropping," Hanauer admits. "It's the MST or the multinational companies."

As the movement celebrates its 25th anniversary, the story is the same across Brazil. While the eucalyptus industry dominates the southern regions, the sugar cane and soy industries proliferate in the northeast, the central east and the Amazon. At its 2007 national conference, the MST highlighted the struggle of agrarian reform against the multinational agro-giants.

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva made such reform a central theme in his 2002 campaign, but he quickly ratified his support for the agro-industry.

In 2007, he shook hands with President Bush, promising to join forces to lead the world in ethanol production. Brazil's agribusiness boom—accompanied by the arrival of U.S. corporations Cargill, ADM, Bunge and Monsanto—has knocked small farmers off their land and consolidated agricultural production into fewer hands.

Hanauer says the fight is "a small movement against giant, transnational corporations with foreign capital. It's a dispute of very unequal forces."

"But I'll tell you, it's worth it," says Çigana, a mother of 11, who participated in the march to Southall and who also received a couple dozen acres of land in Itaguaçu in December. "Here in the movement we have peace, we have harmony, we have union. Life outside is only drug trafficking, theft, crime, and I don't want that for my kids or my grandchildren." ■

MICHAEL FOX is a freelance journalist and documentary filmmaker based in South America. His latest documentary, *Beyond Elections: Redefining Democracy in the Americas*, is available at www.beyondelections.com.

Blackwater to Battle Pirates

BLACKWATER WORLDWIDE AND other private security firms are taking to the high seas to battle pirates.

In 2008, pirates attacked more than 100 ships off the coast of Somalia, and, as of early January, roughly 15 ships and 250 crewmembers were being held for ransom.

For months, the U.S. Navy has been part of an international coalition patrolling the Gulf of Aden, a busy shipping lane located off the coast of Somalia. About 20,000 merchant ships pass through the region annually, often traveling between Asia and Europe and carrying an estimated 90 percent of the world's traded goods. Vessels captured in the Gulf of Aden attract, on average, a ransom of \$2 million.

Blackwater began offering anti-piracy services in October and reports that it has been in contact with more than 70 companies inquiring about protection. In early December, officials from the North Carolina-based security firm were in



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NOTHING BUT NET

Although refugees in Africa face many obstacles, it is mosquitoes that are the number one killer of African refugees. Every year, these insects infect 500 million people around the world with malaria, and kill 1 million.

Nothing But Nets, a grassroots subset of the U.N. Foundation, began after sportswriter Rick Reilly challenged his readers in the May 2006 issue of *Sports Illustrated* to donate \$10 each for anti-malaria bed nets. Within a few months, donations exceeded \$1 million.

Since 2006, the project has provided more than 2 million nets to refugees, saving hundreds of thousands of lives, according to the foundation's website.

"It keeps people alive," says Amy DiElsi, spokeswoman for Children's Health at the U.N. Foundation. "There's no reason anyone should die from malaria."

One bed net can protect a family for up to four years because of the safe and long-lasting insecticide woven into the net fabric.

You can become a team leader and recruit friends and family to support the organization, or increase awareness by joining a pre-existing team.

For more information, visit the foundation's website at www.nothingbutnets.net.

—Elizabeth Kiefer



London to woo potential clients, including shipping and insurance companies. So far, it has not received any contracts.

Blackwater Spokeswoman Anne Tyrrell says, "interest is definitely there" to hire private firms. "This is a partial solution to a huge problem. When you're faced with a threat as large as what cargo is faced with today, it has the potential to really cripple world economies," says Tyrrell. "We see ourselves as 'gap fillers.'"

Blackwater recently retrofitted a 183-foot ex-research vessel—called the *McArthur*—to carry up to 45 people, weapons and a helicopter. The ship is currently stateside and Tyrrell says she does not know when it will travel to the Gulf of Aden.

"Sending in private military companies that are armed is something that has not been well thought out," says Nick Davis, a former British army pilot and CEO of Anti-Piracy Maritime Security Solutions, which provides nonlethal maritime security. "The second that we go down there with private military companies and start popping off pirates, they'll start doing the same."

Davis says that "99 percent of the time," pirates—mostly poor fishermen—fire warning shots. "They do not aim to take you out, they do not aim to kill you. But as soon as they discharge a weapon, you legally would be able, in self defense, to return fire. Nobody that would pick up a weapon for Blackwater would ever fire a warning shot. They would probably just go straight for the kill."

Aside from Blackwater, other for-hire forces are also looking to cash in from the crisis. Mississippi-based private security company HollowPoint Protective Services and Britain's Hart Security have reportedly shown interest in providing guards and recovering seized ships.

"My perception all along has been—It's all about a show of force," HollowPoint CEO John Harris said on *Wired* magazine's website on Nov. 25. "They [the pirates] are looking for something they can pick off and move on to the next target."

Among private contractors, Blackwater could become the largest and most heavily armed presence in the region.

But outsourcing security has been problematic, as evidenced in Iraq. In December, the Justice Department indicted five



French soldiers arrest presumed Somali pirates in the eastern part of the Gulf of Aden off the Somali coast.

Blackwater employees in the 2007 shooting deaths of 17 Iraqi civilians in Baghdad.

"Security companies haven't always had the lightest of touches in Iraq, and I think Somalia is a pretty delicate situation," Roger Middleton, writer of a recent report on piracy in Somalia for Chatham House, a London-based think tank, told the Associated Press in October.

That delicate situation worsened after Somalia's president resigned abruptly on Dec. 29. The East African country—nearly the size of Texas, with more than 9 million people—has not had a functioning government since 1991.

Amid chaos on land and sea, Somalia will now have to contend with a new U.S.-backed U.N. Security Council resolution that allows foreign forces to take the fight against Somali pirates ashore. The Dec. 16 resolution states that countries and regional organizations—with advance notice from Somalia's transitional government to the U.N. secretary-general—"may undertake all necessary measures that are appropriate in Somalia, for the purpose of suppressing acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea."

But the maneuver could backfire, instead serving as a rallying point for Islamic insurgents battling the weakened government.

Whether it's U.N. forces or private contractors fighting piracy, captive crewmembers in Somalia remain in danger, says Davis of Anti-Piracy Maritime Security Solutions: "The pirates don't know Blackwater from Adam, and that's the problem."

—Sanhita SinhaRoy

Victory for Smithfield Workers

ON DEC. 11, 52 percent of workers voted to unionize at Tar Heel, N.C.-based Smithfield hog plant, the world's largest hog slaughterhouse. The slim margin is a poor indicator of an enormous victory, following a 16-year drive in a state with only 3.3 percent union density—the lowest in the country.

Smithfield set up shop in 1992 in North Carolina, where right-to-work laws stifle organizing and let workers in unionized plants refuse membership dues and fees.

With high-speed assembly lines and sharp knives, workers process 33 hogs a minute—32,000 a day—often under lax safety rules. Smithfield has largely ignored demands for new equipment and safer machinery, and often fired injured workers.

"From the day they laid the first brick down, the owner said this plant would never unionize, and if so, he would close the damn doors," says Terry Slaughter, who has worked there for seven years.

In 1994 and 1997, organizers for the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) failed to win elections. Some workers were fired for signing union cards, and the company allegedly disrupted the second election with violence. Until 2005, Smithfield deputized its own police force and set up an on-site detention center to keep a lid on organizing.

Slaughter says that when he arrived in 2002, the majority-Latino workforce had almost completely turned over since the 1997 election. Organizing had hit a lull. He and co-workers got a boost in 2006 after the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled that previous elections were tainted by company malfeasance and called for another vote.

The NLRB decision forced Smithfield to pay \$1.5 million in back pay and rehire fired workers like Keith Ludlum, who was terminated in 1994 for organizing.

"The company was reacting with such aggression to our activities," says Slaughter. "When Ludlum showed up, he knew his rights, and it gave [us] a stepping stone."

Latinos made up two-thirds of the plant's workforce until a series of raids,

starting in January 2007, cut their ranks—sending the union campaign into disarray as a rumored election drew near. Twenty-one workers were locked up and hundreds never returned to work.

In October 2007, the company filed a suit under the Racketeer Influenced and Corruption Organization Act against the union's year-old Justice@Smithfield campaign. UFCW had called a boycott while underwriting environmental groups to expose Smithfield's pollution record. The company's suit alleged extortion, saying



Smithfield Tar Heel workers show their union support outside the plant on the morning of the election.

the union's campaign had cost it \$1 billion. A U.S. district court agreed and dismissed UFCW's appeals, ruling that the union could face charges even if its claims against the company were true. Workers continued to distribute union materials and began writing "Union Time" on their hard hats.

"We took the opportunity to say, 'You guys are the union,'" says Carl Green, ground coordinator for UFCW. "You have to act like the union, even if we haven't won yet."

It worked. In late October, Smithfield settled out of court. The agreement called for a union election in six weeks—the first in 10 years. The company dropped its lawsuit and the union ended the boycott. Union organizers were allowed inside the plant to talk with workers, an unprecedented gain.

Workers must now battle Smithfield management to get a contract. Employees don't have sick days and remain subject to a punitive point system for missed work. Despite winning small raises, workers have

seen irregular payment from Smithfield, which has unilaterally altered rates. Benefits remain paltry and workers have little job security.

"Any mistake you make, you can be fired, no explanations, no nothing," says Slaughter. "Right now they can treat you any way they want."

The success of the contract campaign—much like the organizing campaign that led to the vote—relies on sustained involvement by workers to keep Smithfield from fomenting divisions or pushing a watered-down agreement. After more than 16 years of battling for the right to organize, workers are undaunted.

Says Lydia Victoria, a 14-year Smithfield employee: "We won't be happy until we're all moving together."

—Paul Abowd

G.I. Skinhead

DOMESTIC SKINHEAD GROUPS are recruiting U.S. military members. They're looking for "ghost skins"—personnel without records of white supremacist activity or overtly racist tattoos.

According to a recently declassified July report from the FBI's Domestic Terrorism Analysis Unit, "extremist leaders have historically favored recruiting active and former military personnel for their knowledge of firearms, explosives and tactical skills and their access to weapons and intelligence in preparation for an anticipated war against the federal government, Jews and people of color."

Between October 2001 and May 2008, 203 individuals active in the white supremacist movement had claimed or confirmed ties to military service. While that number is a small percentage of the nearly 1.5 million active-duty military personnel, the report notes, "the prestige which the extremist movement bestows upon members with military experience grants them the potential for influence beyond their numbers."

A 2006 report by the Southern Poverty Law Center revealed that, in order to meet wartime recruiting goals, the Department of Defense had "relaxed standards designed to weed out radical white supremacists."

Forty members of Congress subsequently urged then-Defense Secretary Donald

Rumsfeld to crack down on extremists in the military or prevent them from joining in the first place. But neither Rumsfeld nor current Defense Secretary Robert Gates have made a sustained effort to do so.

"Military extremists present an elevated threat to both their fellow service members and the public," Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.) wrote in an open letter to Rumsfeld. "We witnessed with Timothy McVeigh that today's racist extremist may become tomorrow's domestic terrorist."

McVeigh was a decorated veteran of the 1991 Gulf War before he and a co-conspirator blew up the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995—the largest act of domestic terrorism in U.S. history.

The FBI released the report—titled "White Supremacist Recruitment of Military Personnel since 9/11"—to law-enforcement agencies nationwide, detailing more than a dozen criminal cases involving Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans and active-duty personnel who are involved in extremist activity.

In 2006, the leader of a Texas-based skinhead organization called the Celtic Knights attempted to obtain guns and explosives from a soldier at Fort Hood, Texas, who had served in Iraq and was a member of neo-Nazi group the National Alliance.

Matthew Kennard, a freelance journalist whose 2008 graduate school thesis at Columbia University looked at how the U.S. military is allowing the far right to join its ranks, has monitored popular skinhead online chat rooms.

In the neo-Nazi online forum, Blood & Honour, "88Soldier88" wrote on Feb. 18, 2008, "I am in the ARMY right now. I work in the Detainee Holding Area [in Iraq]. ... I am in the infantry but want to go to SF [Special Forces]. Hopefully the training will prepare me for what I hope is to come."

"There are actually a lot more 'skinheads,' 'Nazis,' white supremacists now [in the military] than there has been in a long time," wrote one Blood & Honour member who identified himself as Jacob Berg in an e-mail to Kennard. "The biggest reason I'm so proud of my kills [reportedly

of women, children and elderly people] is because by killing a brown, many white people will live to see a new dawn."

"The rhetoric on the chat threads is appalling, these alleged soldiers talk about killing 'sand niggas,' 'hajjis' and glorify the killing of innocents," Kennard tells *In These Times*. "How far you can trust this is obviously up for debate, but I have talked to white supremacist soldiers who I know have been in Iraq and Afghanistan and their attitude to Arabs is unsurprisingly one of disdain."

Through documents obtained from the U.S. Army's Criminal Investigative Division, Kennard discovered that Army commanders have terminated investigations of suspected extremist activity in the military, in one case because it would interfere with a suspect's imminent deployment to Iraq.

"This is not an ideological preference for white supremacists," Kennard says. "The military just can't meet their troop needs, so their standards have had to drop. That won't change until the war scales down."

—Jacob Wheeler

appall-o-meter

2.0 Working That Angle

Ever wonder how U.S. military operatives make any headway with the locals in the hinterlands of Afghanistan? Wonder no more. "You're trying to bridge a gap between people living in the 18th century and people coming in from the 21st century," an intelligence veteran explained to the *Washington Post*, "so you look for those common things in the form of material aid that motivate people everywhere."

In other words, boners. Nothing wins the fickle loyalty of a superannuated tribal chieftan quite like the gift of raging, chemically induced tumescence. You know, a little blue pill to make him feel like top dog again. Something just for him and the four wives. "Whatever it takes to make friends and influence people," another U.S. intel veteran told the *Post*, "whether it's building a school or handing out Viagra." Yeah, right, schools.

2.9 Fun With Guns and Trains

A Sheboygan, Wis., man ate hot lead recently in a pantomime train heist that went horribly wrong. As part

of the weekend-long extravaganza in nearby Random Lake celebrating the refurbishment of an old steam engine, historical re-enactors staged a simulated shootout with police after pretending to steal dynamite from a local hardware store to use in robbing the train, which was carrying Santa Claus. God only knows why.

Anyhow, at least one re-enactor had loaded his shotgun with birdshot instead of blanks, resulting in a very unhappy Thomas Rumpff, who was whisked off to a local hospital with some 46 pellets lodged in his body. According to the *Sheboygan Press*, the heist carried on as planned, and Santa, unscathed, greeted children.

3.7 The Cake Nazi

A father from Holland Township, N.J., cried foul in December after his local ShopRite grocery store refused to



inscribe his son's birthday cake with "Happy Birthday, Adolf Hitler!" Adolf Hitler is the tyke's name. Well, Adolf Hitler Campbell. Little Adolf's sisters are JoyceLynn Aryan Nation Campbell and Honszlynn Hinler Jeannie Campbell, the latter handle being an impossibly cute tribute to a certain Nazi by the name of Heinrich Himmler.

Things have not gone well for the Campbell family, publicity-wise, since national media got wind of papa Campbell's antics. Every media outlet under the sun wants to poke its cameras in on the family freak show, and pundits have lined up to berate the parents. There have even been death threats.

"I just want all this to be gone," Heath Campbell told the Easton, Penn., *Express-Times*. "I didn't really think, I guess, that the world is this cruel."

—Dave Mulcahey

Cross-cultural in Connecticut

NEW HAVEN, CONN.—IN early October, Lorenza Rodriguez Mendoza arrived in New Haven, Conn., to visit her daughter, whom she hadn't seen in 10 years.

She and nine other women made the trip from Tlaxcala, Mexico, with a three-month travel visa to visit family members who had come to the United States to work.

The women's journey began seven years ago, when they formed a community organization in Tlaxcala, the smallest state in Mexico. Many of New Haven's Mexican immigrants come from this region.

Marco Castillo, an anthropologist from Tlaxcala, had passed through New Haven a couple of years earlier and met John Jairo Lugo, an organizer with Unidad Latina en Acción, a local grassroots group that supports undocumented immigrants.

Lugo has a biweekly radio show in Spanish called *Barricada*—or “Barricade”—on community station WPKN in Bridgeport, Conn., and he began devoting the last 15 minutes of each show to calls from Tlaxcaleros living in New Haven. Listeners in Tlaxcala would link to the program through the Internet, then broadcast it to Radio Universidad, where many community members could listen.

As the women in Tlaxcala heard their loved ones' voices on the radio, they decided to visit them in the United States, through a celebration of their culture—their language, food and dance.

On Columbus Day weekend, they put together a dance performance that attracted about 150 people, Lugo reports. The celebration—called the First Festival for the Identity of the Americas—took place at a park in Fair Haven, a Mexican neighborhood of New Haven.

A dinner featuring food from Tlaxcala followed a week later at a local restaurant. Dozens of guests—both Mexican and Anglo—sampled traditional cooking.

“We don't want to forget our roots,” says Manuela Cuapio, a social psychologist in Tlaxcala, who came to New Haven to visit her father. “We want the children who were born here to know their culture, too.”

snapshot



GAZA CITY—On Jan. 6, Palestinian families who have fled their homes because of the Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip take shelter at a school run by the United Nations. On the same day, Israeli forces killed at least 30 people when artillery shells targeted a U.N.-run school in Jabaliya refugee camp. (Photo by Abid Katib/Getty Images)

Francisca Morales Rosete, who has six children in the United States, calls life in Tlaxcala isolated and lacking opportunity.

“We live in the country,” she says. “There are many poor people who don't have the resources to send their kids to school. That's why so many come to the U.S. There's no work. Our kids walk around in *huaraches* [cheap Mexican sandals], not good shoes.”

Francisca says often families eat beans and corn tortillas three times a day.

Because of NAFTA, cheap tortillas made from U.S. corn have flooded Mexico. Tens of thousands of farmers, unable to compete with such low prices, have been forced off their land and into cities—or across the border—in search of jobs.

Nevertheless, as the U.S. economy has soured and many jobs have disappeared, the number of undocumented immigrants crossing the border has dropped.

An October 2008 report from the Pew Hispanic Center, using U.S. census data, noted that illegal immigration had de-

clined to an estimated half a million annually since 2005, from an average annual rate of 800,000 from 2000 to 2004.

The children of these women have various jobs, from working in fast food restaurants to construction to domestic work. As the United States falls deeper into a recession, it's likely that many immigrants will lose their jobs.

Lugo says that since the women arrived, the economic downturn has led to some job losses among their family members, but none of them have returned to Mexico. “What for?” he asks rhetorically. The workers say they have a better chance at a decent job in the United States than anywhere else.

Several other U.S. organizations working with immigrants in the country (including two on the Arizona border) say they have seen the occasional worker return to Mexico but no appreciable pattern of reverse migration.

—Melinda Tuhus

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

The Dragon We Must Slay



OBAMA AS LINCOLN. Obama as FDR. The instantly classic image of Obama, sticking his jaw defiantly into the pouring rain in Chester, Pa., during a campaign rally, as if he had just come down from Mount Olympus. He was not even sworn into office, and yet all this hagiography cast him, already, as a god.

Which standards will the news media use to judge Obama? Will the benchmark be FDR, circa 1944, having revolutionized the government, the economy and on the brink of winning WWII? Or will the benchmark be Bush, despoiler of the economy, of civil liberties and human rights, and of our image worldwide?

By the latter standard, if the Obama administration simply shuts down Gitmo, denounces torture as an element of U.S. foreign policy, ends illegal wiretaps, acknowledges there is such a thing as global warming, and launches its ambitious rebuild-the-infrastructure stimulus package, he'll be an unqualified success. By the former standard, all of these things are mere prelude: necessary but hardly sufficient.

I don't think the FDR standard is fair to impose on Obama—but what if we did? Just as FDR had to slay, once and for all, the key elements of laissez-faire capitalism, in which people were left unprotected from its vagaries and excesses, Obama and the congressional Democrats now have to slay the giant that academics refer to as neoliberalism.

Even with the meltdown of an unregulated Wall Street—Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman Christopher Cox admitting his agency was asleep at the wheel, especially with the Bernard Madoff scandal, and former Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan also acknowledging that deregulation of the financial sector was probably a mistake—neoliberalism remains a formidable colossus.

Neoliberalism was the new “common sense” about the government and “free-market” economics that took hold under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. (For you nerdy types who want more than my Classic Comics summary, see David Harvey's superb *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.)

The project of neoliberalism was simple: to repudiate the notion that the government should provide support for its everyday citizens; to attack all forms of social solidarity (as

Thatcher famously quipped, there is “no such thing as society, only individual men and women”); and to elevate the sanctity of private property, private ownership and “the market.”

Neoliberalism demanded that government regulations and social programs be dismantled so that “the market” (which was constantly personified as having the omniscience of Yahweh) could more justly determine the flow of social services and wealth. The reason we didn't need a safety net for poor people, or government programs to support families was that we have to take individual responsibility for ourselves; that old-fashioned notion of “the public good” just makes people lazy parasites dependent on government handouts. Structural barriers, say, based on where you were born, your race, your class position, don't

exist; they were a thing of the past or a figment of people's imaginations.

Neoliberalism, as a philosophy, was hugely successful for nearly a quarter of a century.

Reagan, Thatcher and especial-

ly Bush II successfully demonized government as wasteful, inefficient, irrelevant or all of the above, so institutions it used to manage like schools, prisons, hospitals, even the military, should be turned over to private investors (or, in the case of FEMA, to former managers of Arabian horses). It was only in the wake of Katrina and, now, with what many are belatedly acknowledging may be the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, that the previously unchallengeable common sense of neoliberalism has hit some shoals.

Nonetheless, the news media have, over the past 25 years, repeatedly naturalized neoliberalism as an over-arching worldview. But now, a more holistic look at its dire consequences is hard to find anywhere in the news. The multiple and often impossible-to-understand elements of the current financial catastrophe—subprime mortgages, the reliance on unregulated financial packages called derivatives, the Mad-off Ponzi scheme—all must be bundled into one complete indictment of the abject failure of neoliberalism.

This is one of Obama's biggest challenges. If he's really going to don the mantle of FDR, he must go big, philosophically. He must denounce neoliberalism for the fraud it has been exposed to be and enliven the commonsense of yore: Government oversight and regulation aren't necessary evils; they are crucial to our political, economic and social survival. Period. ■

Government oversight and regulation aren't necessary evils; they are crucial to our political, economic and social survival. Period.

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

Justice for Jon Burge's Victims?



US. ATTORNEY PATRICK J. Fitzgerald dominates the news these days for his arrest and probe of Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich. But the aggressive prosecutor is also pursuing a case that finally may bring justice to an infamous story of nearly two decades of police abuse in which more than 100 black men were gruesomely tortured.

Last October, Fitzgerald arrested and indicted Jon Burge, a retired Chicago police commander long accused of leading a corps of torturing cops. Fitzgerald charged Burge with obstruction of justice and perjury in a three-count indictment.

At a news conference, he said Burge “broke the law when he was supposed to uphold it,” and he warned that others who lied about torture could eventually be charged.

According to several independent investigations, between 1972 and 1991, Burge and detectives under his command routinely tortured black males. A 2006 probe led by a court-appointed special prosecutor found that Burge and his men used torture techniques that included electro-shocks to the genitals, burning skin on radiators and mock suffocations with plastic bags. However, the statute of limitations prevented prosecution.

Fitzgerald’s indictment hurdles that legal barrier by charging Burge with perjury instead of actual torture. While answering questions in a 2003 lawsuit filed by one of the alleged victims, Burge denied using torture methods. The recent indictment cites those answers as evidence.

Fitzgerald’s action justifies the strategy pushed by attorneys for many of Burge’s victims, who felt frustrated by the special prosecutor’s report that detailed torture, but provided a legal sanctuary.

The charges also echo a strategy urged by five Chicago City Council members in a Sept. 20, 2007, letter to Fitzgerald. “We believe that federal prosecution of Burge and his men is possible and that the five-year federal statute of limitations would not be a bar,” they wrote. “Burge and the others could be prosecuted for perjury, for obstruction of justice and for an ongoing conspiracy to cover up their torture scheme.”

Although Fitzgerald’s action indicates progress, members of the group Black People Against Police Torture are not

mollified.

“Burge is still free,” says Patricia Hill, executive director of the African American Police League.

Former Illinois Gov. George Ryan freed four death row inmates after he concluded their confessions were brutally and illegally coerced. More than 25 inmates remain imprisoned because of confessions extracted in Burge’s torture chambers.

The latest wrinkle in the saga is the news that the local Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), which represents thousands of officers below the rank of sergeant, voted to pay for Burge’s defense in his upcoming federal trial on perjury and obstruction of justice.

G. Flint Taylor, an attorney for the Chicago-based People’s Law Office, who has pursued the Burge case for more than two decades, calls the FOP’s action “outrageous.”

The notorious police union has long been an outspoken Burge supporter. In 1993, the group provoked controversy by attempting to enter a float

honoring Burge into the South Side St. Patrick’s Day parade.

By footing Burge’s legal bills, Taylor says, the FOP “continues a sordid and racist history for ... the FOP of defending police torture in the city.”

But the police group itself is also being sued for its support of Burge. One current and one former Chicago cop, both African Americans, recently filed a lawsuit against the FOP for racial discrimination. They say the union refused to pay their legal fees, while at the same time funding Burge’s defense.

In the face of such plausible charges of police torture, it may seem odd that a group representing the forces of law and order would willingly associate with the torture ring-leader. But Chicago’s Fraternal Order of Police apparently has another motive.

“The FOP was created in the 1960s by the South Side Irish to protect the fraternity of what was mostly Irish cops in those days,” explains Brendan Shiller, an attorney for one of the black police officers suing the group. “Although the police force has become a bit more diverse since then, there has been little change in its political power dynamics, and the FOP’s agenda reflects those persisting forces.”

Despite those complications, Fitzgerald’s aggressive indictment gives hope to many that Burge and his boys may finally face the music, even if the song is a bit out of tune. ■

In the face of such charges of police torture, it seems odd that a group representing law and order would associate with the torture ringleader.

BY KIM BOBO

Hilda Solis: Great Choice for Labor



REP. HILDA SOLIS (D-Calif.), President Obama's pick for labor secretary, could help restore dignity and respect to American workers.

Before her appointment, Solis was not well known outside of California. But, with time, she could honor the spirit of Frances Perkins—FDR's labor secretary and the first female Cabinet member—who was known for her tireless fight

for American workers. Perkins' name adorns the Labor Department building in Washington, D.C.

Like Perkins, Solis is a fighter for workers. She fought for farmworker rights in the California state legislature and later used her own funds to support a successful ballot initiative to raise the minimum wage.

Like Perkins, Solis isn't part of the establishment. FDR was criticized for appointing a woman, particularly one from outside the labor movement, to serve as labor secretary. Similarly, Solis isn't a creature of the Clinton years, unlike many of President Obama's appointments. She is the child of immigrant workers and attributes her call to public service to César Chávez, United Farmer Workers of America leader.

Perkins visited the homes of immigrant workers in Chicago, Philadelphia and New York. She investigated sweatshops and prosecuted employers who exploited workers.

Solis, too, has visited immigrant workers' homes, marched with janitors, investigated sweatshops and fought to prosecute unethical employers. In 1995, she worked with UNITE HERE! to recover back wages for El Monte garment workers. She then helped pass California's landmark anti-sweatshop law.

But the challenges facing Solis are formidable. The nation's workforce is battered and increasingly unemployed, with job losses in 2008 expected to be about 2.5 million.

What's more, in the last decade, wages and benefits for the vast majority of American workers have declined and will likely continue to erode amid the current economic recession.

To meet these challenges, the Labor Department must do three things:

First, it should help create and support new jobs. Currently, it has no job creation programs, so no staff or structures exist to help with green jobs or any other job-creation initiatives.

Second, the department should coordinate and oversee the training of America's workers. Although there are some programs for this, the United States is falling drastically behind other industrialized nations in educating and training workers. Rebuilding the training division and figuring out how to coordinate with other agencies, such as the Department of Education, will be difficult.

Third, the department must set—and enforce—workplace standards. Standards were set 80 years ago under the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act, but they desperately need updating. The department's wage enforcement and health and safety enforcement are a disaster.

Then there's the issue of unions. Solis is a strong advocate of the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), which would

make it easier for workers to organize unions and get first contracts. (See "Ready to Rumble," page 20.) But employer groups, led by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, are fervently against EFCA and are

pledging an all-out fight against it.

Healthcare, too, is an urgent matter for the labor secretary, given that most of those without healthcare are low-wage workers and their families. The absence of a national healthcare program puts industries like American automakers at a competitive disadvantage with foreign companies that operate in countries with national healthcare systems.

Solis and the Labor Department will also need to help address U.S. immigration policy. Dragging immigrant workers out of factories in shackles and building fences along the U.S.-Mexico border are hardly adequate responses. Reform demands a strong role from the labor secretary in helping set and enforce workplace standards for all workers—regardless of immigration status—and in using trade and aid to raise workers' standards in other nations, particularly in Mexico.

With all of these obstacles, Solis will need support from labor, religious and community activists around the nation. She'll need a strong team of advisers, activists and staff working with and for her. Solis will need to tap the wisdom of job-creation experts, job-training leaders and on-the-ground enforcement advocates, such as worker center leaders. And she will need a strong advocacy base, drawing upon labor and religious allies to help pass worker-friendly legislation.

The country needs another Frances Perkins. Solis is the woman for the job. ■

Labor Secretary Hilda Solis will need support from labor, religious and community activists to help create jobs and pass worker-friendly laws.

Green Jobs for Whom?

Obama must ensure that the green economy provides a living wage and opportunity for all

BY CHRISTOPHER WEBER

UNTIL RECENTLY, MOST PEOPLE had never heard of “green-collar jobs.” Yet the phrase is suddenly on policymakers’ tongues.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) has spoken out for such jobs. So has Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.). Last year, incoming Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis introduced a green-collar bill in the House. Even Republican Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty has noted, “the development of green jobs will be one of the biggest changes in our economy since the industrial revolution.”

For his part, President Obama has made green-collar jobs a major part of his approach to the economic crisis. On Dec. 6, he said, “We will create millions of jobs by making the single-largest new investment in our national infrastructure since the creation of the federal highway system in the 1950s.”

But will these jobs be as plentiful—and as worker-friendly—as the new administration and environmentalists would have us believe? And can green businesses really create opportunities for workers given the current economic crisis?

An economic shift

Green-collar jobs are already a growing part of the U.S. economy. As demand has risen for clean energy and environmentally responsible manufacturing, workers

are turning out everything from hybrid cars to organic cotton underwear.

In most scenarios, a green-collar worker is one who translates new environmental technologies for consumers, design-

profits and building wind and solar plants per dollar invested than just buying natural gas or oil or coal.”

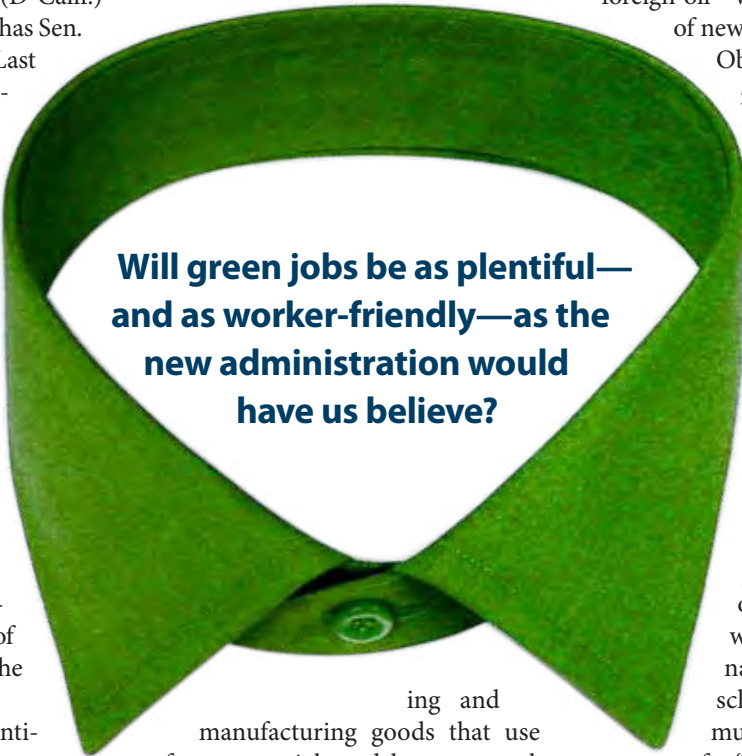
One of the grandest election promises—aside from liberating the nation from foreign oil—was to create a sizeable pool of new jobs. On the campaign trail,

Obama offered a plan to create 5 million green-collar jobs over 10 years. He promised to support this initiative with \$150 billion from the federal coffers.

During his Dec. 6 address, Obama condensed the proposed timeframe for this green investment to two years. He outlined green jobs and infrastructure improvements as part of his much larger economic stimulus plan intended to jolt the anemic U.S. economy. Up to \$100 billion would go to upgrading the nation’s infrastructure, with schools, hospitals and communication systems targeted for “green” improvements.

At the same time, more radical visions for the green economy are gaining support. Two progressive think tanks, the Center for American Progress (CAP) and the Apollo Alliance, have argued for “green recovery” plans—economic roadmaps that emphasize the key role of green jobs.

CAP commissioned a study by the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Unveiled in September, “Green Recovery:



**Will green jobs be as plentiful—
and as worker-friendly—as the
new administration would
have us believe?**

ing and manufacturing goods that use fewer materials and less energy than those of just a few years ago. Environmental groups from the Sierra Club to the League of Conservation Voters say these jobs are a victory for the environment and for workers.

“This is a great time for us to ramp up the level of investment in clean energy,” says Pete Altman, climate campaign director for the National Resources Defense Council. “Significantly more people can be employed in energy-efficiency ret-

A Plan to Create Good Jobs and Start Building a Low-Carbon Economy” urges investment in retrofitting buildings for energy efficiency; expanding public transit and freight rail; building a cutting-edge electrical grid; and developing wind, solar and biofuel energy. It also notes:

Public and private investment in energy efficiency reduces energy demand and lowers energy costs. ... Lowering energy costs for educational buildings eventually means more funds for teachers, books and scholarships. Retrofitting hospitals over time releases money for better patient care.

These improvements will lead to the creation of 2 million jobs in two years, according to the study’s authors, Robert Pollin, Heidi Garrett-Peltier, James Heintz and Helen Scharber. About half of the jobs would be in construction and manufacturing. The rest would come as suppliers, retail and other industries ramp up behind this growth. All told, the authors estimate that their approach would cost taxpayers about \$100 billion over two years.

Several unions, including the AFL-CIO, support an aggressive stimulus like the one proposed by the study.

“I think everybody in the labor movement recognizes that we have to make this economy more sustainable as well as more just,” says Ron Blackwell, AFL-CIO chief economist. “The particular challenge is to make the transition to a greener economy in a way that does not impose disproportionate costs on working families.”

Blackwell points out that the \$150 bil-

lion Obama has committed to a green economy is only a first step. Still, he says the precedent is encouraging him: “We need to shift from an economy driven by asset inflation—equities in the 1990s and housing since 2000—to more sustainable, public-led growth to restore the competitiveness of our national economy.”

Cleaner, greener labor

Labor unions and their workers could benefit by organizing this emerging green workforce.

“A lot of industries that stand to grow and prosper in a green economy are ones that you might not expect,” says David Foster, longtime regional director for the United Steelworkers. “A lot of people think of steel as a dirty, un-environmentally friendly industry, but the average wind turbine shaft contains 300 cubic tons of steel.”

Foster currently serves as the executive director for the Blue-Green Alliance, a labor-environmental partnership that wants to see quality jobs emerge from green investment. The alliance began with a 2006 pact between the United Steelworkers and the Sierra Club. In October, the Communications Workers of America joined the alliance, as did the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC).

“We’ve been building partnerships between environmental groups and organizations, especially labor, because we have a lot in common,” explains the NRDC’s Altman. “Some of the toughest problems that we face in the United States can be answered

by investing in and building our economy around clean energy sources. That creates the environmental benefits we need to keep our world healthy and clean. These are also energy sources that put more people to work by creating more good-paying jobs than traditional energy sources.”

The emphasis on emerging technologies might make it seem that workers trained in the old “brown” economy are in trouble. But that’s far from true.

“Virtually all the jobs that will be generated by green investments will be for people doing the kind of work they are already doing,” says Robert Pollin, a University of Massachusetts-Amherst professor of economics and lead author of “Green Recovery.” “In my view, there is no such thing as ‘green skills’ as distinct from the skills most workers already have.”

Unions aren’t championing green-collar jobs solely out of labor concerns. Foster says they’re also moved by environmental values.

Six years after the Steelworkers was founded, it helped launch investigations into the 1948 “Killer Fog” disaster in Donora, Pa., in which toxic fumes from several steel mills became trapped over the town, killing 20 people. By 1955, these investigations led to the passage of the state’s Clean Air Act, the first of its kind in the nation.

“Steelworkers have drawn close connections between pollution in the workplace and pollution generally,” says Foster.

Where are the jobs for women?

A growing chorus of feminist writers and economists are asking about women’s place—or lack of one—in the green economy. In a Dec. 9 *New York Times* op-ed, Linda Hirshman, author of *Get to Work: A Call to Arms for Women of the World*, wrote that most green-collar job proposals, including Obama’s, focus too heavily on construction and engineering trades dominated by men.

“It is possible that you could, without employing a single female, build your way out of this economic crisis if you spent a humongous amount of money on really energy-efficient things like railroads,” Hirshman says. “But by concentrating so hard on this macho attitude toward environmental pollution, you would miss an opportunity to



Wind-powered turbines sit at the mouth of Spanish Fork Canyon in Utah.

GEORGE FREY/GETTY IMAGES

solve two problems at once”—that is, global warming and gender inequality.

Hirshman points out that Obama, in his December address, compared his building program to President Eisenhower's 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act, a parallel that she says dismays her. "I think Barack Obama and his staff have been watching too many episodes of 'Bob the Builder,' with their determination to build roads and bridges," she says. "Roads and bridges are what got us into this climate pickle in the first place."

Hirshman says innovative ways exist for women to enter the green-collar workforce in large numbers. "Nine percent of the construction workers in the United States are female, a very tiny number. If you exclude the secretaries, it's 3 percent." An affirmative action program for all federally funded construction projects could dramatically boost this number, she says.

Women workers could also spearhead efforts to retrofit the nation's buildings, Hirshman argues. Given the experience of many women as teachers and communicators, they are ideally suited, she says, to serve as "green counselors," working with homeowners and landlords to weatherize homes for greater energy efficiency. "You wouldn't have to have apprenticeship in the construction trades or a degree in engineering or any of the things that are current barriers to women."

Ensuring 'green-collar' jobs are good jobs

Greg Norton, a retired union steelworker in Dundee, Ill., says he worries about "the long-term prospect of keeping [green] jobs in the United States. The same forces in the marketplace that have managed to destabilize the housing industry can just as easily export any new 'green' manufacturing jobs to wherever they find most profitable for themselves."

Others like Laura Owen, a labor economist at DePaul University, find hope in the promised federal investment. "The question I would ask is whether the technological knowledge for outsourcing green technology exists in all other countries," she says. "Encouraging production on a larger scale through government assistance can help reduce costs and give the new firms

advantages over future competitors."

However, current trade agreements pose a significant barrier to any federal investment in green jobs. According to consumer watchdog group Public Citizen, a stimulus package that provides funds, tax breaks or loan guarantees to green businesses could run askew of World Trade Organization (WTO) rules banning such subsidies.

'Obama and his staff have been watching too many episodes of 'Bob the Builder.' Roads and bridges are what got us into this climate pickle in the first place,' says author Linda Hirshman.

Thus, trade reform is critical to building the green economy. Obama has indicated he wants trade rules renegotiated in favor of green businesses. He wrote to the Oregon Fair Trade Coalition last May, "I will take all the necessary and appropriate steps to ensure that policies designed to reduce global warming pollution are not constrained by trade agreements."

What those "appropriate steps" entail remains to be seen, but the United States will have to incorporate environmental standards to a much greater degree than the WTO does. Under current law, corporations can elude emission standards by setting up their dirtier operations overseas—nullifying green jobs in the process. To address this problem, in December 2007, Obama pledged to the Iowa Fair Trade Campaign to have "binding environmental standards" added to trade agreements, "so that companies from one country cannot gain an economic advantage by destroying the environment."

As for wages, the best way to ensure that all green-collar positions pay a living wage, according to Pollin, is to push for a low unemployment rate of 4 percent or less. "Historically, those circumstances have forced wage increases and better conditions for low-wage workers," he says. "Beyond that, we need the traditional institutions—decent minimum wages and union bargaining power—to make sure the employment expansion generates decent jobs, not poverty-level jobs."

Van Jones, founder and president of the

advocacy group Green for All, argues that the new economy must address social and economic injustices. In his book, *The Green-Collar Economy*, Jones writes that green jobs can uplift marginalized workers:

The green economy should not just be about reclaiming thrown-away stuff. It should be about reclaiming thrown-away communities. ... Formerly incarcerated people de-

serve a second shot at life—and all obstacles to their being able to find that second chance in the green sector should be removed. Also, our urban youth deserve the opportunity to be part of something promising. Across this nation, let's honor the cry of youth in Oakland, Calif., for "green jobs, not jails."

Activists and local politicians are now building training programs so that low-income workers, people of color and immigrants can access green-collar jobs.

In New York, Sustainable South Bronx runs a program that teaches participants how to install green roofs, clean toxic spills and restore rivers. Of the 128 low-income workers who have completed the program, 85 percent currently have jobs. In California, Women's Action to Gain Economic Security has helped low-income immigrant women build four successful green housecleaning cooperatives that employ hundreds. And in Chicago, Growing Home has trained 100 formerly incarcerated, homeless or addicted individuals in organic farming. Sixty-five program graduates are now employed, and 90 have found permanent housing.

In 2008, similar training programs opened in Los Angeles, Newark and Oakland. Obama has also pledged to expand federal job-training programs to include green skills.

But for all its promise, the green economy offers no guarantees of justice for workers. Campaigns to raise wages, to improve benefits and to unify labor will remain as important in the green future as they are in the present. ■



READY TO *RUMBLE*

Workers and Corporate America battle over the Employee Free Choice Act

BY DAVID MOBERG

As President Obama and a more solidly Democratic Congress get down to work, their first priority will be dealing with three decades of fiscal mismanagement. The destruction of government as a stabilizing force—along with financial deregulation, corporate globalization and wealth redistribution to the rich—have led to the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression. This great

30-year shift in wealth, power and public priorities coincided with—and was in large part caused by—the decline of a labor movement under assault from corporations and right-wing ideologues.

No single remedy will fix all that ails America, nor is any strategy likely to succeed if it does not give working people more power over their jobs. A renaissance for labor could ensure that workers share in the growth of their productivity and provide the stimulus of consumer demand that the economy will need for a sustained recovery. Consequently, one of the most critical political battles this year will be the fight over the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA). Passed by the House but filibustered in the Senate in 2007, the act would make it easier for workers to form unions.

Here's how it would work: When a majority of workers sign union authorization cards, they would gain recognition for

their union. EFCA would sharply increase penalties against employers who violate labor laws when workers organize. It would provide workers faster relief from violations, such as firing for union activity. And it would provide the option of mediation and arbitration if the employer and union fail to reach a first contract on their own.

It is a modest reform that could not only help workers who join unions but all working people, the economy and the future of progressive politics.

'Armageddon'

After a long wait in line, Albert Higgins, a former security guard and now a union organizer, reaches the counter at a super-sized McDonald's in downtown Chicago. "One small hot chocolate," he says. Then, addressing the clerk, he asks, "Francisco, do you know that your boss is making more than \$6,000 an hour

while you're making \$8?"

Higgins and other union supporters were poking back at the fast food giant, whose president, Don Thompson, in late November, urged 2,400 franchise owners to contact Congress to oppose EFCA.

Corporate America is girded for battle. An employer offensive—costing upward of \$100 million, according to union estimates—is being mobilized against EFCA. Randel Johnson, vice president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, described the coming battle over the act as “Armageddon.” The Chamber has pledged \$10 million toward the war against EFCA.

During last year's election campaign, Wal-Mart told its supervisors that voting for Democrats would lead to passage of EFCA, which would be bad for the corporation. And Home Depot founder Bernie Marcus raged that corporate executives who did not contribute to endangered Republican Senate candidates “should be shot.”

Shadowy front groups, with undisclosed financial backing that almost certainly comes from major corporations and rich right-wingers, have entered the fray.

Richard Berman, profiled by CBS's “60 Minutes” as “Dr. Evil,” is a notorious anti-consumer publicist and a hired gun for the alcohol, tobacco and fast food industries. Berman, who has close ties to the Bush administration and the Chamber of Commerce, operates the Center for Union Facts (and its spin-off the Employee Freedom Action Committee) and produces hyperbolic anti-EFCA ads that depict union leaders as crooks and thugs.

Other anti-EFCA front groups include the corporate alliance called Coalition for a Democratic Workplace, Americans for Job Security (a Chamber of Commerce front group financed by the insurance industry), the old-line National Right to Work Committee (along with its offspring, the Public Service Research Foundation), and right-wing kingmaker Grover Norquist's Alliance for Worker Freedom.

Corporations and the right argue that EFCA will take away the secret ballot, let union thugs intimidate workers into joining unions and destroy businesses. But EFCA does not eliminate the option of National Labor Relations Board

(NLRB) elections, even though most unions would pursue majority sign-up when they can. EFCA simply gives the right to choose the method to workers and unions, not the employers.

And it is employers—not unions—that have intimidated workers. In 2007, nearly 30,000 workers suffered illegal employer retaliation for exercising their rights at work, roughly five times as many than in 1967, according to the NLRB.

Even a survey by the anti-union HR Policy Associates turned up only 42 clear cases of union misconduct in signing union authorization cards in the more than 70 years since the National Labor Relations Act was passed in 1935, according to the AFL-CIO.

In forming a union, workers are simply voluntarily associating—as protected under federal and international human rights laws—in order to establish a collective voice to counterbalance the power of employers. They are not voting between two candidates: management and a union.

Further, the employer defense of secret ballots is a sham. “Workers without a union don't vote on anything,” says Tom Woodruff, director of Change to Win's strategic organizing center. “When was the last time non-union voters voted on a pay raise?” For that matter, when did corporations seek worker secret ballots on executive pay or offshoring jobs?

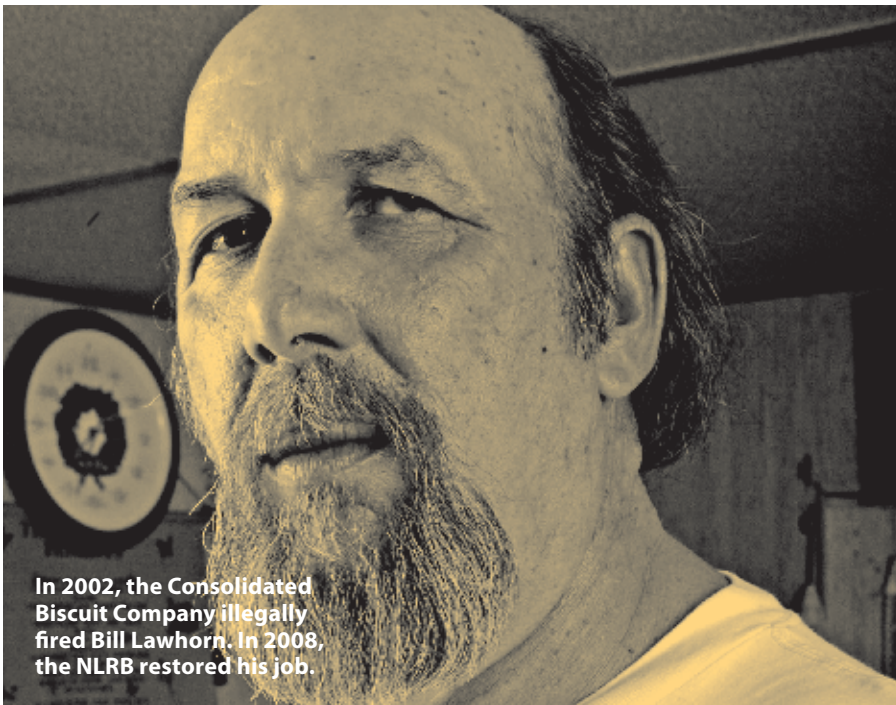
EFCA opponents object to unions on principle. And, if they could, they would make it even harder for workers to unionize. What they want is power—and the wealth they can capture with that power.

“We like driving the car, and we're not going to give the steering wheel to anybody but us,” outgoing Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott said when asked about EFCA.

Corporations and Republicans are attacking not just EFCA's rule changes but unionism itself—even the notion that workers should be paid well. Taking aim at the United Auto Workers in particular, they have used the Detroit Three auto crisis to argue that unions—and good wages—are bad in a global economy.

In an unsigned copy of a Dec. 10 memo circulated among Washington Republican insiders, conservative Republicans criticized auto industry aid as Democratic pay-off to organized labor. They wrote, “This is





In 2002, the Consolidated Biscuit Company illegally fired Bill Lawhorn. In 2008, the NLRB restored his job.

a precursor to card check and other items. Republicans should stand firm and take their first shot against organized labor, instead of taking their first blow from it.”

The attack will get nastier, and labor needs to respond by going on the offensive. “We have to expose them,” Woodruff says. “They brought us the disaster we’re in. If we follow them, we’ll be stuck in this disaster, or worse. People voted for change. We have to organize and demand the change we voted for.”

Aggressive tactics

When private employers fight against unionization, they often do so with tactics that are illegal or barely legal.

Kate Bronfenbrenner, director of labor education research at Cornell University, has found in her most recent research that “employer opposition has steadily increased,” including in “intensiveness and aggressiveness,” such as firing union supporters.

Employer opposition takes its toll, as workers fear for their jobs or economic wellbeing. In the face of employer hostility and long, drawn-out campaigns for union recognition, workers grow cynical or disillusioned, persuaded that collective action is futile, even if they would like a union.

Even when unions have enough worker

support—usually well over a majority—to call an election, workers only succeed in winning recognition and a contract 20 percent of the time, according to a study of union elections from 1999 to 2004 conducted by John-Paul Ferguson and Thomas A. Kochan, respectively a graduate student and professor of management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. When employers fought unions so aggressively that they were charged with an unfair labor practice, only one in 10 petitions for an election resulted in a contract.

If employers are caught violating the law now, their actions—like firing a union supporter—can be redressed only long after they have chilled workers’ desire to organize. And compared to other workplace violations, like racial or sexual discrimination, the penalties against employers are minuscule—such as posting a promise not to break the law again.

Bill Lawhorn and Lucille Musser are victims of our present weak labor laws.

In 2002, tired of watching Consolidated Biscuit Company (CBC) supervisors harass other workers, Bill Lawhorn contacted the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers union, hoping that he and fellow employees could organize a union and improve life in the McComb, Ohio, fac-

tory. Out of 875 workers, 650 agreed and signed union cards. But the company responded by bringing in a professional anti-union firm and insisted on holding an election.

Supervisors threatened that if the union won there would be pay cuts, that immigrant Latino workers would lose their jobs and that the plant might even be closed. They came to Lawhorn’s house and told him he would be fired if the union won.

The scare campaign worked. The union lost. The next day, the company fired Lawhorn.

On Dec. 3, 2008, more than six years after he was fired, the National Labor Relations Board finally restored Lawhorn’s job, following lengthy CBC appeals of the 40 complaints filed against it.

“Labor laws in this country are just bad,” says Lawhorn, 52, a forklift driver who joined in a new drive to organize a union when he returned to work. “I thought I had a protected right to do this union organizing. Apparently not. They say I won this case, but it took over six years. The owner lost, but he won: He tells everyone, ‘If you try to get a union, this will happen to you.’”

Such employer abuse is the main reason why, even though more than half of non-union workers say they would like to join a union, the share of the work force in labor unions continues to shrink—down from around 35 percent in the mid-1950s to 12 percent today, with only 7.5 percent in the private sector.

Lawhorn, who is still fighting for a union, says, “If we’d passed the Employee Free Choice Act, we’d be working on our third contract now.”

Perhaps. Consider the case of Lucille Musser. She knows all too well, that even if workers at her job had voted for the union six years ago, they might not have a contract yet. In late 2005, Musser, 70, and several dozen other workers at Heartland Human Services, a private nonprofit mental health facility in the small southern Illinois town of Effingham, decided they needed a union to protect them from a capricious boss.

They quickly approved the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) as their union, but contract negotiations dragged

on fruitlessly—even with mediation and a union offer of arbitration. The workers went on strike in July 2007, but Heartland brought in strikebreakers. Nearly a year later, the strikers collectively walked back in to rightfully reclaim their jobs, but Heartland locked them out.

“I knew it would be difficult but worth it,” Musser says. “We knew Heartland would not change if we didn’t do something drastic. But had the Employee Free Choice Act been in effect, we would not have had to go out on strike.” And they would have had a contract by now.

Is EFCA enough?

Labor strategists have long debated over how best to remedy the situation. Should labor once again try to restrict employers’ speech, forcing them to be neutral, so only workers decide if they want a union? Should labor try to equalize access to the workplace for both union organizers and employers? Should labor try to require that all work places be represented by a union and collective bargaining, but give workers the choice of what kind of representation they want? Or, as John Wilhelm of UNITE HERE!, the hotel and

poll found that 73 percent of the public—including 37 percent who felt strongly—favored the Employee Free Choice Act after hearing its three provisions. This poll hints at what education could mean for public support of EFCA.

Getting through the Senate

Early this year, unions plan to present 1 million signatures in support of EFCA to Congress, and they are calling on allies from civil rights, environment, religious and other movements to broaden the campaign beyond labor. American Rights

‘We like driving the car, and we’re not going to give the steering wheel to anybody but us,’ outgoing Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott said, when asked about the Employee Free Choice Act.

Original intent

Organizing was quite different after the Wagner Act, also known as the National Labor Relations Act, passed in 1935. The NLRB recognized unions either through majority sign-up (about one-fourth of cases) or elections (often used to determine worker support when there were competing unions, company-sponsored unions, or unions organized “top-down” with employer agreement).

For the drafters of the act, “it was inconceivable that, given the opportunity, workers would not join a union,” says James Gross, Cornell University professor of labor policy. Typically 80 percent to 90 percent of workers voted for a union.

“The NLRB ruled early that the selection of the bargaining representative was none of the employer’s business, either for or against. It was solely the business of the employees. Any statement from employers was inherently coercive,” says Gross.

Indeed, the law’s principal author, Sen. Robert Wagner (D-N.Y.), considered the purpose of the law to encourage collective bargaining as a counterweight to the “economic despotism” of wage labor. Since then, however, through both court and administrative actions, the balance of rights and power has shifted to employers.

garment workers’ union, argues, should labor focus less on legislation and more on convincing President Obama to support organizing campaigns?

EFCA came out of a 2003 summit meeting of 245 union organizers from 45 unions. Unions then began introducing workers who had gone through organizing drives to politicians and made EFCA central to their political endorsements.

“Having workers feel that they truly do have a right to form unions, that employers will be punished for violating their rights, and that there is a smooth, streamlined process available to them will solve the majority of problems,” says AFL-CIO organizing director Stewart Acuff.

In elections last year, especially in hotly contested Senate races in North Carolina and Minnesota, a group of unions informally worked together to counter efforts by far-right political action groups and corporations to attack Democratic candidates’ support for EFCA.

Labor is keeping its political apparatus intact to mobilize support from both union members and the citizens. To that end, public education will be critical: Many people—even union members—do not understand what workers face when organizing, nor do they understand how a stronger labor movement benefits even non-members. In December, a Peter Hart

at Work, a labor-founded coalition, is playing a leading role in this effort.

EFCA almost certainly has majority support in the House and Senate, but it is less clear that Democrats can muster the 60 votes needed in the Senate to stop a filibuster. Already, Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.), with virulently anti-union Wal-Mart and Tyson as corporate constituents, has signaled she’s not sure EFCA is needed. And another four to six Democratic senators from relatively rural or non-union states are also uncertain (though some Democrats and moderate Republicans might be persuaded to vote for cloture, if not the bill itself). Yet even if a cloture vote fails, Democratic leaders have parliamentary options to move the legislation.

Obama continues to publicly support EFCA, but the question remains as to how much influence he is willing to expend both publicly and privately for the bill when he is pushing so many other initiatives. Unions insist that EFCA must be an integral part of both the economic stimulus and Obama’s promised plan to restore the middle class.

Tom Woodruff puts it this way: “The Employee Free Choice Act is essential to the economic recovery of the country, doing something about the income inequality that fed the recession—near depression—we’re in today.” ■

Unequal Education

No Child Left Behind demands equal test scores from neighborhoods with unequal incomes and resources

BY MICHELLE CHEN



THE STUDENTS AT MIAMI Edison Senior High School in Florida “fail” every day. Edison is a textbook example of the struggling urban school: dismal test scores, high dropout rates, a reputation for violence and a largely poor, black student body.

So, it was no surprise when the Florida Department of Education gave Edison a grade of “F” for the 2007-2008 school year—a designation that, under the federal dictates of No Child Left Behind, is supposed to compel the school to re-vamp itself.

But current senior Tranette Myrthil sees the government’s report card as part of the failure. The school “reforms” the state has handed down are squeezing out the things

that make education meaningful for her.

Myrthil relished reading in English class, and is frustrated that her class spent so much time drilling for the FCAT (Florida’s multiple-choice reading test), instead of delving into more novels. In the end, she got a 10th-grade reading score of two (on a scale of five)—a grade that she says “doesn’t speak for me.”

Recalling books that stirred her, she says, “I learned things that I could use now ... in the 12th grade.” But the material she studied to pass the FCAT, “I can’t bring with me to the 12th grade, because it’s just for that moment. It’s just for that test.”

After seven years of the Bush administration’s landmark education law, No Child Left Behind, a disconnect remains

between the educational demands imposed on students like Myrthil, and what Myrthil wishes she could demand from her education.

Classroom politics

The premise of No Child Left Behind, passed in 2001, sounds basic enough: ensure that children from all backgrounds attain a quality education from good teachers. But the debate over how to reach that goal is fractured by ideology, bureaucracy and entrenched barriers to opportunity.

Mainstream reform discussions have centered on “school choice” initiatives that move public investment toward less-regulated charter schools and private services. Market-oriented reformers, both Republicans and Democrats, champion experimental charter schools and rigid, test-centered “accountability” mandates for teachers—measures that have attracted political momentum but also alienated teacher unions. Other advocates, including one of President Obama’s leading education advisers, Linda Darling-Hammond, favor more cooperative strategies, focusing on comprehensive teacher training and academic standards that extend beyond rote skills. Progressive education activists point to social factors driving racial and economic gaps in achievement.

Education was a side issue in the presidential race. But after getting mired in political gridlock throughout the Bush era, activists hope the Obama administration will recast the debate on how to make public schools work for all communities.

Under No Child Left Behind, schools that consistently miss yearly targets for reading and math improvements and other criteria may be hit with strict sanc-

tions. Reform measures could range from private tutoring to full-scale state takeover or conversion to a charter school. For the past few years in Miami, Edison's teachers and administrators have worked under government mandates to boost student performance by dramatically restructuring programs and staff.

School systems in Washington, D.C., New York City and other areas have floated initiatives to weed out supposedly incompetent teachers or to tie pay scales to staff performance. Obama's pick for education secretary, Arne Duncan, is seen as a moderate but gained prominence as head of Chicago Public Schools by pushing for the closure of underperforming schools and boosting charters.

But progressives in the education community question conventional notions of "achievement" and "failure." To Mildred Boveda, a special-education teacher at Myrtle Grove Elementary School in Miami Gardens, Fla., the obstacle to real change is the confinement of the school policy dialogue within classroom walls.

"It's not a coincidence that the schools that are failing are in the harshest neighborhoods. There's social issues that are going on," she says. The crisis in schools parallels other community problems: "There are no street lights, there are no police. It's filthy, there are drug addicts and prostitutes walking the streets. You're going to tell me that that's not going to affect teacher morale, student morale and then student performance—then you're kidding me."

Smarter than the test

Edison's students aren't the only ones in trouble. According to 2007-2008 state data compiled by *Education Week*, nearly 30,000 schools missed "adequate yearly progress" benchmarks. For 2007, while a large portion of all students fell short of state proficiency levels in reading and math, failure was especially prevalent among low-income, black, Latino and Native American students.

At Edison, the political frenzy over standards translates into a disengaged classroom. Myrthil says that while her reading score left her discouraged about

the system, some fellow students, faced with repeated failures, don't even attend class anymore.

"Knowing that you're smarter than what this test is saying—but you still can't pass it—it makes you feel angry and frustrated," she says.

Meanwhile, schools are hurtling toward No Child's key deadline—all students at

'It's no coincidence that the schools that are failing are in the harshest neighborhoods. There are no street lights, no police. It's filthy, there are drug addicts and prostitutes walking the streets.'

grade-level reading and math proficiency by 2014.

Teachers, critics warn, are pressured to align curricula with tests, in turn sapping resources from subjects like music and art, and undermining educational approaches based on critical thinking and dialogue.

For progressive educators, the stiff bureaucracy of the testing establishment runs counter to both students' interests and teachers' aspirations.

"I'm glad the principals are paying attention to what students aren't gaining, and what we are going to do to make sure that they can gain," Boveda says. "But at the same time, I wish there was more than just that state test."

High-stakes tests tend to demoralize rather than motivate, she says: "Students and teachers get physically sick. That's how much we want to prepare for this test. But it's like the whole thing is set up for you to fail, anyway."

One looming concern about test-based accountability systems is that they might actually drive schools to dilute or erode standards—dumbing down tests, for example, or easing the credentialing process for teachers. In a recent University of Chicago study, researchers linked high-stakes test schemes to a pattern of short-changing underserved students: teachers would concentrate on students most likely to reach proficiency, potentially leaving struggling kids, who need the most help, to fall further behind advantaged peers.

Progressive education activists argue that one-dimensional testing replicates and deepens structural biases by further stigmatizing blacks, Latinos, English-language learners and other marginalized groups.

JoEtta Gonzales, director of Equity Alliance at Arizona State University, one of 10 regional equity assistance centers for schools nationwide, says that in principle,

the standards themselves are not harmful, but "it's the instructional practices that are failing the communities."

In racially and economically marginalized communities, she says, "one of the things that's being left out is adapting and modifying the curriculum so that it's culturally responsive, and that it incorporates the learning interests of the students that they're teaching."

Teacher-oriented reformers promote more holistic, participatory teaching practices; peer-review systems for evaluating staff performance; and alternative assessment methods for students, like portfolios and creative projects.

Mark Simon, national coordinator of the Tom Mooney Institute for Teacher and Union Leadership, a pro-union reform group, says test-based programs don't encompass the intellectual challenges students will face in the real world. "There has to be a shift," he says, "toward learning how to think, learning how to problem-solve, and learning how to grapple with information that you've never seen before and make sense out of it."

Just another pattern

In Miami, Myrthil is far removed from the school reform debate in Washington, but nevertheless grasps the root causes behind her school's crisis. Last school year, she worked with classmates to explore educational quality as a civil rights issue in Project POWER—Promoting Our Will through Education and Re-

search—an action-research initiative at Edison that engaged youth as education researchers and advocates. Myrthil realized that students in more affluent areas had access to tutoring, arts programs and other enrichments that are nowhere to be found in her school's community.

"I feel like we should have the same opportunities," Myrthil says. "But the people

school," Kahlenberg says.

Yet reformers taking a long-range view contend transfer programs will not truly equalize a system that lacks the resources to ensure every kid a spot at a quality school. Rather than shuttling students around, they say school policy should focus on building the capacity of underserved communities to educate their

"there's been a concerted drive against that egalitarian notion."

Recently, a coalition of progressive reformers and civil rights activists presented a "broader, bolder approach to education" that emphasizes social programs to advance educational and economic opportunity: expanding healthcare for families, strengthening relationships between communities and schools; improving out-of-school enrichment programs for neighborhood youth.

Louie F. Rodriguez, a Florida International University education professor who launched Project POWER, says national policy should empower communities to shape schools from the ground up, through local youth, parents and other stakeholders.

"It would be pretty amazing," Rodriguez says, "if Obama said, 'We need teachers that are going to motivate students, that believe in students, that are going to have high expectations for students.' And then leave it up to the local community people to define what high expectations look like. . . . We need to fundamentally change the way we do things in our education system by shifting the role that students, educators and communities play in the reform process."

"If you're looking for policies that will improve outcomes for kids in low-performing schools, that has to be driven by people who deeply understand public education," says Stan Karp, a veteran teacher working with the progressive education journal *Rethinking Schools*. "If the administration relies on social engineering, by people who basically want to break up the public system and blame teachers and their organizations for its problems, then we're going to have the same kind of fights that we've had for the last eight years, and we're not going to get the progress that we need."

Teachers like Boveda, herself a graduate of local public schools, know what a real conversation about education might sound like.

"Instead of stigmatizing the school and putting more pressure on students," she says, "let's talk about the social issues that are going on, within and outside and around the school." ■

'We have only one area in American life that we demand equality from, and that is test scores in schools. But do we want people's income to be more equal, or people's health to be more equal?'

handling the school system—they feel like: 'Oh, this is where we came from, and this is where our parents came from, and it'll just be another pattern.'"

Though No Child Left Behind's testing fixation alienates many educators, the nationwide collection and analysis of test data under the law has fueled advocacy around racial and economic disparities. Still, education activists say the harsh mandates leave schools without the funding or flexibility needed to confront systemic inequities.

No Child's statistics underscore the blight of school segregation, says John Beam, executive director of Fordham University's National Center for Schools and Communities. But ultimately, he says, "I don't think we'll have better public schools until we're willing to take on institutional racism in our urban school systems and to be serious about the inequitable distribution of resources that it causes."

Richard Kahlenberg, a senior fellow with the liberal Century Foundation think tank, suggests economic integration can alleviate school disparities, chiefly by expanding No Child's school transfer provisions. The idea is to allow students to move from failing schools to better ones—typically in higher-income communities that provide better teachers and other academic supports.

"Probably the single best thing you could do for a low-income student is give her a chance to attend a middle-class

children well.

Nikisha Valdez, a social studies teacher at Edison who helped lead Project POWER, says that over time, the school has lost students through transfers, but in many cases, "if the resources were there, if we had the support that we need, we could fulfill that goal for them. It's really sad, especially when you think of Edison being such a fixture in the community."

Beyond No Child

Years after No Child Left Behind promised to transform public education, political discussions still hinge on a basic question: How broadly should the challenge of fixing schools be defined? While the classroom offers a starting point for addressing inequality, not even the best-equipped school can level out the skewed social landscape students go home to each day.

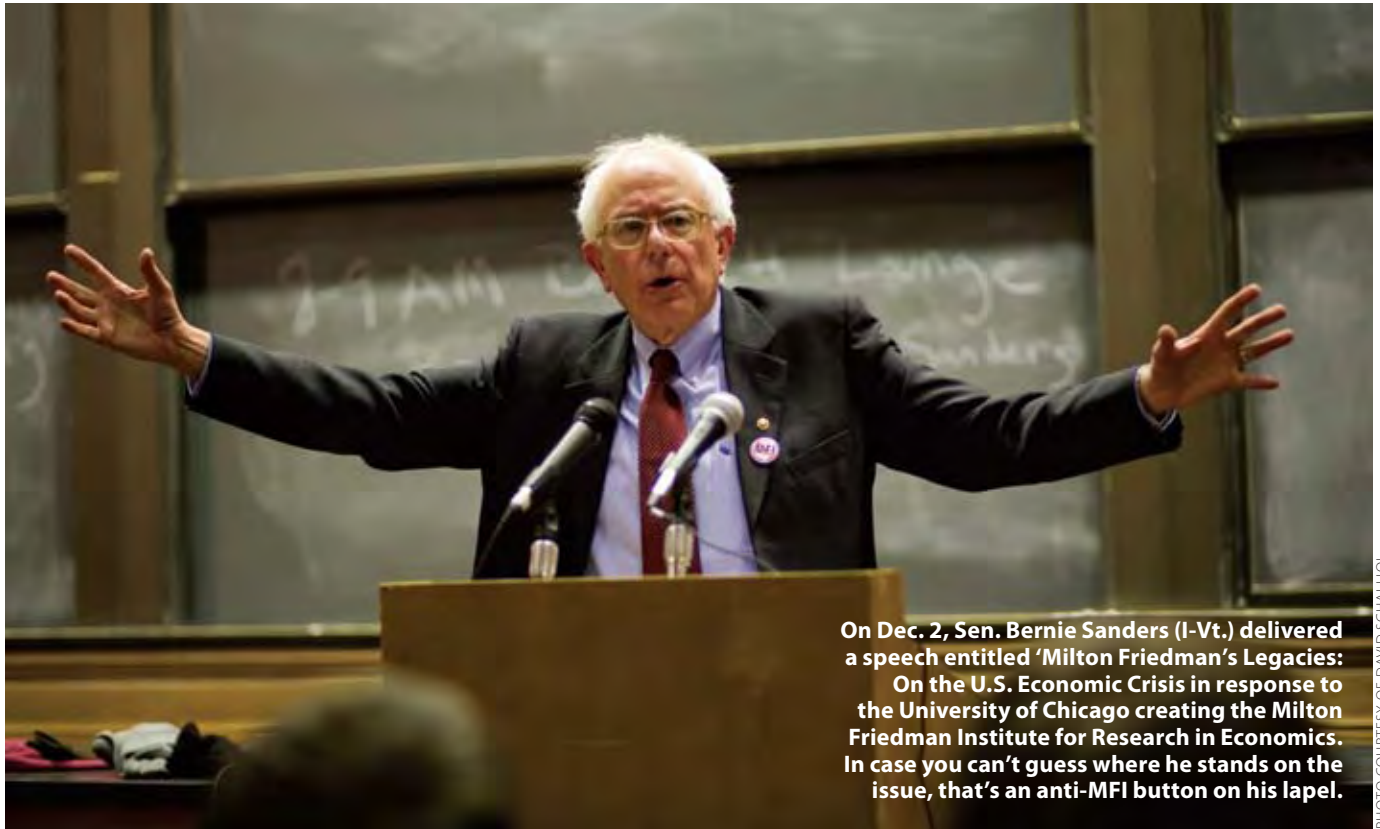
To New York University education professor Deborah Meier, policymakers can't tackle school reform without a deeper consciousness of underlying socioeconomic barriers.

"We have only one area in American life, virtually, that we demand equality from, and that is test scores in schools," she says. Within No Child's narrow framework of accountability "we want test scores to be more equal, but do we want people's incomes to be more equal? Do we want people's health to be more equal?" In other policy arenas, she adds,

The Failed Prophet

As Wall Street collapses, so does Milton Friedman's legacy

BY BERNIE SANDERS



On Dec. 2, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) delivered a speech entitled 'Milton Friedman's Legacies: On the U.S. Economic Crisis in response to the University of Chicago creating the Milton Friedman Institute for Research in Economics. In case you can't guess where he stands on the issue, that's an anti-MFI button on his lapel.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID SCHALLIOL

THE LATE MILTON FRIEDMAN was a provocative teacher at my alma mater, the University of Chicago. He got his students involved with their studies. He was a gifted writer and communicator. And he received a Nobel Prize for his contributions to economics.

But Friedman was more than an academic. He was an advocate for, and popularizer of, a radical right-wing economic ideology.

In today's political and social reality, the University of Chicago's establishment of a \$200 million Milton Friedman Institute (in the building that has long housed the renowned Chicago Theological Sem-

inary) will not be perceived as simply a sign of appreciation for a prominent former faculty member. Instead, by founding such an institution, the university signals that it is aligning itself with a reactionary political program supported by the wealthiest, greediest and most powerful people and institutions in this country. Friedman's ideology caused enormous damage to the American middle class and to working families here and around the world. It is not an ideology that a great institution like the University of Chicago should be seeking to advance.

Those who defend the Milton Friedman Institute will assure us that it will encourage a free and open exchange of

ideas. That may very well be true. But if the goal of the institute is simply to do non-ideological research, there are a lot of names that one could come up with other than that of the most polemical and ideological economist of his time.

My suspicions only deepen when I read on the University of Chicago website that donors who contribute more than \$1 million to the project will have a special relationship with the Institute as members of a Milton Friedman Society and will be expected to facilitate the institution's "connections to leaders in business and government."

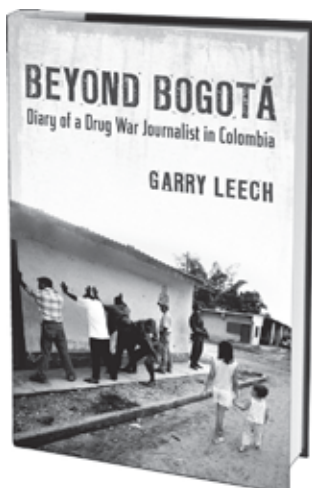
I work in Washington, D.C., and I know about the power that big money has over

process. When the insurance companies and the drug companies and the oil companies and the banks and the military-industrial complex make contributions to political campaigns, we usually know exactly what it is they want in return.

Maybe I'm being cynical and maybe these big players who are kicking in millions for the Milton Friedman Institute are merely interested in promoting open academic discussion and research. Maybe that is the case.

"Leech conveys brilliantly and with vivid insight the magical qualities of this rich and tortured land, and the struggles and torment of its people."

—NOAM CHOMSKY



"*Beyond Bogotá* is critical to understanding the so-called 'War on Drugs' waged by the U.S. government in Colombia. . . . If you want the truth about the reality on the ground there, read this book."

—DAHR JAMAIL, author of *Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches from an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq*

"Garry Leech belongs in the company of a handful of war correspondents—Patrick Cockburn, Robert Fisk, Christian Parenti—who have been risking life and limb to bring to light the catastrophic human and environmental consequences of U.S. foreign policy."

—FORREST HYLTON, author of *Evil Hour in Colombia*



www.beacon.org
www.beaconbroadside.com

Frankly, I doubt it.

The timing of this project is a little ironic. Friedman earned his bread by denouncing government at virtually every turn. He, like his acolyte, former Federal Reserve Chair Alan Greenspan, believed that a largely unregulated free market constituted the most superior form of economic organization imaginable. Well,

vide a strong safety net for our children, for our seniors or for the disabled.

Well, it turns out that when the shoe is pinching their foot, they have become the strongest believers in government intervention—especially if working people and the middle class are bailing them out.

But the issue here is not just economic policy. It goes deeper than that. It touches

If I went before a town hall meeting in Vermont and asked if people thought it would be a good idea to abolish Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, people would think I was crazy.

the tune of the right-wing free marketeers has changed a bit in the last few months.

My colleagues in the Senate and I are now picking up the pieces of a banking system brought to the edge of collapse by this theory of deregulation and by the insatiable greed of a small number of wealthy financiers playing in the market and engaging in incredibly risky—if not illegal—behavior.

In the rush to bail out Wall Street, we saw President Bush, Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, the people in U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Business Roundtable—folks who loved Friedman's ideas and who, no doubt, would be prepared to financially support a Milton Friedman Institute—reverse their longstanding rhetorical opposition to government intervention.

Instead, they demanded that we come to the rescue of the financial firms that had lined up in front of Congress for their emergency welfare checks.

For years, all of these people, including the president of the United States, have been telling us that government should not be involved in ensuring healthcare for all Americans as a right of citizenship. ("What a terrible idea!")

They have been telling us that the government should not be involved in making quality education affordable to all people, that the government should not be empowered to ensure that we reverse greenhouse gas emissions, that government should not regulate pollution that contaminates our air and water and land, and that the government should not pro-

vide a strong safety net for our children, for our seniors or for the disabled. Are we as human beings supposed to turn around and not see the suffering that so many of our brothers and sisters are experiencing? Are we content to be living in a nation where, thanks in part to the Friedmanite ideology, the richest 1 percent owns more than the bottom 90 percent and the top one-tenth percent owns more than the bottom 50 percent?

Should we ignore the reality that under Bush, more and more billionaires were created in a period when we had, by far, the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world? Some 18 percent of our kids are living in poverty and we are shocked that we have more people in jail than any other country on earth, including China. Are we supposed to ignore those realities?

With all due respect to the late Milton Friedman, his economic program is nothing more than a wish list for the greediest, the most monied interests in our society. At the same time that this ideology is supported by the rich and powerful—except when they're lining up in Washington for their welfare checks—this same ideology is almost unanimously opposed by working families and middle-class people across this country.

If I went before the people in a town hall meeting in Vermont and asked for a show of hands of how many people thought it would be a good idea to abolish Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, people would think I was crazy. Not

one person in a hundred would support that idea because it is so patently absurd.

Even in the case of conservative Republicans, no GOP candidate would ever run on a platform of abolishing Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. They may attempt to abolish these programs while in office, but they will never discuss that agenda on the campaign trail.

What would some of the items on Friedman's wish list be? First of all, the Friedmanites would be supportive of the concept of a culture of greed. They want people making billions of dollars on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek* because these people are supposed to be our national heroes. We are not supposed to recognize a teacher who makes \$40,000 a year opening up the minds of young people. We are not supposed to recognize a childcare worker who makes \$18,000 a year giving poor children an opportunity to grow intellectually and emotionally. Those jobs are not considered important work.

But if you're a billionaire on Wall Street creating exotic financial instruments that end up being worth nothing, you are considered a hero. The fact that this culture of greed has permeated our political culture means that corporate CEOs can now earn more than 400 times what their workers earn without fearing a political backlash.

This wish list for the rich would include having the wealthy pay as little as possible in taxes. It would include the destruction of the American labor movement, abolishing the minimum wage and doing away with regulations that ensure workplace safety and keep our food and products safe.

Now we have a case study for what happens when the ideology of Milton Friedman becomes the operating ideology of the government. Under Bush, the median family income has declined by thousands of dollars. Millions of Americans have entered the ranks of the poor. Some 7 million have lost their health insurance. Some 3 million have lost their pensions. And the gap between the very rich and everybody else has grown much wider.

Right-wing economists have argued that we can simply trust wealthy people and large corporations to do the right thing. Recent history has demonstrated what a silly idea that is.

Our country is due for a transformation. We have endured years of right-wing ideology and we are eager to move in a different direction. I believe that we will see a major reordering of social and economic priorities, and that this last general election represented a repudiation of right-wing economic arguments.

We will see the day when healthcare is a right of citizenship in the United States.

We will see a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and an understanding that never, ever again can we allow an administration to manipulate and deceive its way into a war.

Our role as progressives is to remind our country that alternatives are possible, that social democratic movements in Northern Europe and elsewhere have secured universal access to quality healthcare and have effectively abolished the kinds of poverty and homelessness we see in our society. This will not happen on its own: it will require popular engagement and organization. But the changing political landscape has provided us with an opportunity to advance the cause of social and economic justice.

In the Bush era—a period in which some of Friedman's greatest admirers managed the U.S. economy—the top 400

families in this country saw their wealth increase by \$670 billion.

Yet we have children in this country who have no healthcare, children who are undernourished and children who sleep out on the streets. From an economic perspective, from a moral perspective and from a philosophical perspective, the ideology of Milton Friedman is dead wrong. And the University of Chicago is making a serious mistake in establishing a new platform for its failed ideas. ■



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Joel Bleifuss
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On New Year's Day, Palestinians search for bodies in the rubble of the destroyed house of Hamas leader Nizar Rayan after an Israeli missile strike in Gaza.

Gaza in the Crosshairs

Israel cites all the wrong reasons for its invasion of Gaza

BY NEVE GORDON

BEER-SHEVA, Israel—On Saturday, Dec. 27, the war began. The first bombardment took 3 minutes and 40 seconds. Sixty Israeli F-16 fighter jets bombed 50 sites in Gaza, killing more than 200 Palestinians, and wounding close to 1,000 more. A few hours after the deadly strike, Israeli

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert convened a press conference in Tel Aviv. With Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni sitting on his right and Defense Minister Ehud Barak on his left, Olmert declared: “It may take time, and each and every one of us must be patient so we can complete the mission.”

But what, exactly, is Israel's mission?

Although Olmert did not say it directly, the “mission” includes four objectives.

The first is the destruction of Hamas, a totally unrealistic goal. Even though the loss of hundreds of cadres and some key leaders will no doubt hurt the organization, Hamas is a robust political movement with widespread grassroots support, and it is unlikely to surrender

or capitulate to Israeli demands following a military assault. Ironically, Israel's attempt to destroy Hamas using force has always strengthened the organization in the end, thus corroborating the notion that power produces its own vulnerability.

The second objective has to do with Israel's Feb. 10 elections. The assault on Gaza is also being carried out to help the Kadima and Labor Parties defeat the conservative Likud and its leader Benjamin Netanyahu, who was ahead in the polls until the war began. Whether the devastation in Gaza will help Livni defeat Netanyahu or help Barak gain votes is difficult to say, but the strategy of competing with a warmonger like Netanyahu by beating the drums of war

says a great deal about the three major contenders.

The third objective involves the Israeli military. After its notable humiliation in Lebanon in 2006, the Israel Defense Forces has been looking to re-establish its reputation. Last spring, it used Syria as its laboratory and now it has decided to focus on Gaza.

Finally, Hamas and Fatah have not yet reached an agreement on how to proceed when Mahmoud Abbas ends his term as president of the Palestinian National Authority on Jan. 9. One of the outcomes of this assault is that Abbas will remain in power a while longer because Hamas will be unable to mobilize supporters to force him to resign.

What is missing from this list of Israeli objectives is the attempt to halt the firing of rockets into Israel's southern towns. Unlike the above four objectives, the government presents this one as the operation's primary objective, which is misleading because Israel could have put an end to the rockets a long time ago.

During the six-month Israel-Hamas truce that ended Dec. 19, there was relative quiet—a quiet broken most often as a reaction to Israeli violence, such as the Nov. 4 bombing of targets in Gaza or the imposition of a total blockade that prevented basic goods, like foodstuff and medicine, from entering the Gaza Strip.

Rather than continue the truce, which would have stopped the rocket attacks, the Israeli government has again chosen to adopt strategies of violence that are akin to the ones deployed by Hamas. Only, the Israeli ones are much more lethal.

The logical fallacy

More than 90 percent of Jewish Israelis support the assault on Gaza. They say to themselves that Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip three years ago, and that despite the withdrawal, Hamas has been shooting rockets at us. This explanation seems logical, yet it elides some crucial facts.

One fact is that Israel maintains sovereignty over the Gaza Strip, despite the withdrawal. Another fact is that the Palestinians have been living in a cage. Palestinians have not had access to basic

foodstuff. Their electricity has been cut off, and many don't have access to clean water.

When one forgets these facts, it is only rational to ask 'Why are they still shooting at us?' This is precisely what the media here has been pumping the public with. By contrast, if you look at what's been going on in the Gaza Strip in the past three years and you see what Israel

not want to hurt civilians," the mother said, "they refrained from opening fire in every direction, which allowed Palestinian militiamen to shoot my boy." When the interviewer asked her about the current Gaza assault, she said, "We should pound and cut them from the air and from the sea," but added, "We should not kill civilians, only Hamas."

The report ended with the interviewer

Despite the ever-increasing loss of Palestinian life, Israel remains the perpetual victim in the collective self image. Regardless of what happens, we Israelis are presented as the moral players in this conflict.

has been doing to the Palestinians, you would think that the Palestinian resistance is rational. And those are the facts missing in the Israeli and U.S. mainstream media.

Under attack

I am not speaking from an armchair. I know what it is like to be under rocket attack. For the past 10 days, my two children—Ariel, 4, and Aviv, 9 months—have been sleeping in a bomb shelter.

After being stuck for 72 hours in Beer-Sheva—located in the Negev Desert, 28 miles east of Gaza—my spouse Catherine and I decided to visit my mother, who lives north, so that our children could play outside during the weekend far away from the rockets.

Once there, I sat to watch TV with my mother, who like most Israelis is a devout news consumer. For the most part, the broadcast was more of the same images and voices of suffering Israeli Jews, along with the promulgation of a hyper-nationalist ethos. One news story, for example, followed a Jewish mother who had lost her son in Gaza about two years ago. The audience was told that the son has been a soldier and, with his brigade, had penetrated the Gaza Strip in an attempt to save the kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit, who has been held hostage by Hamas since June 2006.

"Because members of his company did

asking the mother what she does when she misses her son, and, as the camera zoomed in on her face, she answered: "I go into his room and hug his bed, because I can no longer hug him."

Thus, despite the ever-increasing loss of Palestinian life, Israel remains the perpetual victim in the collective self image. Indeed, the last frame with the mother looking straight into the camera leaves the average compassionate viewer—myself included—a bit choked up. Over the past few years, however, I have become a critical consumer of Israeli news. I can see how, regardless of what happens, we are presented as the moral players in this conflict. Therefore, this kind of reportage—where the huge death toll in Gaza is ignored and Jewish suffering is underscored—no longer shocks me.

What did unnerve me in the broadcast was one sentence from a reporter who covered the entry of a humanitarian aid convoy into the Gaza Strip on Jan. 2.

My mother and I—like other Israeli viewers—learned that 170 trucks supplied with basic foodstuff donated by the Turkish government entered Gaza through the Carmi crossing, on the southern part of Gaza. That the report had nothing to say about the context of this food shipment did not surprise me. Nor was I surprised that no mention was made of the fact that 80 percent of



Gaza's inhabitants are unable to support themselves and are therefore dependent on humanitarian assistance—and this figure is increasing daily. Indeed, nothing was said about the severe food crisis in Gaza, which manifests itself in shortages of flour, rice, sugar, dairy products, milk and canned foods, or about the total lack of fuel for heating houses and buildings during these cold winter months, the absence of cooking gas and the shortage of running water. The viewer has no way of knowing that the Palestinian health system is barely functioning or that some 250,000 people in central and northern Gaza are now living without any electricity at all due to the damage caused by the air strikes.

While the fact that this information was missing from the report did not surprise me, I found myself completely taken aback by the way in which the reporter justified the convoy's entrance into Gaza. Explaining to those viewers who might be wondering why Israel allows humanitarian assistance to the other side during times of war, he declared that if a full-blown humanitarian catastrophe were to explode among the Palestinian civilian population, the international community would pressure Israel to stop the assault.

There is something cynical about how Israel explains its use of humanitarian assistance, and yet such unadulterated explanations actually help uncover an important facet of postmodern warfare. Not unlike raising animals for slaughter on a farm, the Israeli government maintains that it is providing Palestinians with assistance so that it can have a free hand in attacking them. And just as Israel provides basic foodstuff to Palestinians while it continues shoot-

From top: A wounded Palestinian policeman shouts for help inside the Hamas police headquarters following an Israeli airstrike in Gaza City on Dec. 27; Homeless Palestinian families, who have fled their homes, take shelter at a school run by the United Nations in Gaza City on Jan. 6; A Palestinian child carries a bag of bread while other Palestinians queue up to buy bread outside a bakery on Dec. 31 in the Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip.

MOHAMMED ABED/AFP/GETTY IMAGES, ABID RATIB/GETTY IMAGES

ing them, it informs Palestinians—by phone, no less—that they must evacuate their homes before F-16 fighter jets begin bombing them.

One notices, then, that in addition to its remote-control, computer game-like qualities, postmodern warfare is also characterized by a bizarre new moral element. It is as if the masters of wars realized that since current wars rarely take place between two armies and are often carried out in the midst of civilian populations, a new just war theory is needed. So these masters of war gathered together philosophers and intellectuals to develop a moral theory for postmodern wars, and today, as Gaza is being destroyed, we can see quite plainly how the new theory is being transformed into praxis.

We have to say 'no'

This praxis is scary. Israel has been bombing Gaza from the air and massacring people. As *In These Times* went to press, Israel had killed more than 750 Palestinians, including more than 200 children. In order to stop this madness we need two kinds of pressure: Israeli citizens must pressure the government from below, while the international community must pressure Israel from above.

As an Israeli citizen, I still believe in the importance of democracy and in the importance of the Israeli people making a decision. But at this point in history, we need help from concerned citizens in the global arena. We need American citizens to pressure the incoming administration to raise its voice against the use of violence. President Obama has a major role to play but it is unclear that he will do it without pressure from within the United States.

Obama, it is important to keep in mind, has a crucial advantage over his predecessors. Several years of political negotiations—from the 1991 Madrid conference, through Oslo, Camp David, Taba and Annapolis—alongside the publication of different initiatives—from the Geneva Initiative and the Saudi plan to the Nussaiba and Ayalon plan—have clarified what it would take to reach a peace settlement between the warring sides.

The two-state solution entails three central components:

1. Israel's full withdrawal to the 1967 border with possible one-for-one land swaps so that ultimately the total amount of land that was occupied will be returned.
2. Jerusalem's division according to the 1967 borders with certain land swaps

Obama's political vision has engendered hope. My expectation is that he will make good on his promise for change and introduce a courageous initiative that will bring peace.

to guarantee that each side has control over its own religious sites and large neighborhoods. Both these clauses entail the dismantlement of Israeli settlements and the return of the Jewish settlers to Israel.

3. The acknowledgment of the right of return of all Palestinians but with the following stipulation: While all Palestinians will be able to return to the fledgling Palestinian state, only a limited number agreed upon by the two sides will be allowed to return to Israel; those who cannot exercise this right or, alternatively, choose not to, will receive full compensation.

While the conditions that need to be satisfied in order to reach a peace agreement are well known and even though most political leaders understand that the only way to provide real security for the two peoples is by signing a comprehensive agreement, years of negotiations have produced only limited results.

The cruel irony is that the majority of Israelis and Palestinians in the region support the two-state solution but, nonetheless, the two parties cannot reach an agreement because sizable minorities in both camps reject this solution. These minorities have managed to hijack the respective political arenas and have succeeded in creating a deadlock that can only be overcome if the international community, and particularly the United States, assumes a more interventionist role.

With determination and political boldness, Obama can neutralize the rejectionist minorities and resolve this bloody conflict once and for all. I believe that he can achieve this objective if his administration adopts the following strategy:

- First, the White House needs to draft a proposal using the abovementioned

guidelines.

- Second, the draft proposal should be submitted to the two sides so that each one can suggest minor alterations.
- Third, the Obama administration will have to hammer out a final proposal (that is, the Obama Plan).

Finally, this proposal should be publicized and brought to a referendum in both Israel and the Occupied Territories, with the United States and international community applying pressure by declaring that the two parties will be rewarded if they support the initiative and penalized if they do not. Thus, the majority of the people on each side, and not the local leadership or a rejectionist minority, will decide whether or not to accept the peace plan.

Obama's political vision has engendered hope, not only in the United States, but as his appearance in Berlin and the post-election jubilations suggest, in the various populations of the world. My expectation is that he will make good on his promise for change and introduce a courageous initiative that will bring peace to Israelis and Palestinians. He has both an opportunity and a responsibility to do so. ■

NEVE GORDON teaches in the Department of Politics and Government, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. One can read about his most recent book *Israel's Occupation* and more at www.israelsoccupation.info.

Detroit: City of Hope

Building a sustainable economy out of the ashes of industry

BY GRACE LEE BOGGS

DETROIT IS A CITY of Hope rather than a city of Despair. The thousands of vacant lots and abandoned houses not only provide the space to begin anew but also the incentive to create innovative ways of making our living—ways that nurture our productive, cooperative and caring selves.

The media and pundits keep repeating that today's economic meltdown is the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. But in the '30s, the United States was an overproducing industrial giant, not today's casino economy.

In the last few decades, once-productive Americans have been transformed into consumers, using more and more of the resources of the earth to foster ways of living that are unsustainable and unsatisfying. This way of life has created suburbs that destroy farmland, wetlands and the natural world, as well as pollute the environment.

The new economy also requires a huge military apparatus to secure global resources and to consume materials for itself, at the same time providing enormous riches for arms merchants and for our otherwise failing auto, air and ship-building sectors.

Instead of trying to resurrect or reform a system whose endless pursuit of economic growth has created a nation of material abundance and spiritual poverty—and instead of hoping for a new FDR to save capitalism with New Deal-like programs—we need to build a new kind of economy from the ground up.

That is what I have learned from 55 years of living and struggling in Detroit, the city that was once the national and international symbol of the miracle of industrialization and is now the national and international symbol of the devasta-



Shuttered homes line a downtown Detroit street. An estimated one in three Detroiters lives in poverty, making it the poorest large city in the United States.

tion of deindustrialization.

When I arrived in Detroit in 1953, the population was 2 million, the majority white. Today, it is less than 900,000, majority black. Back then, racism was blatant and overt. Many bars, restaurants and hotels refused service to blacks. Blacks could buy homes in inner city neighborhoods but could not rent apartments in buildings right next door to these homes.

Meanwhile, freeways were enabling white flight to the suburbs, and technology was replacing human beings with robots.

In 1973, we elected our first black mayor, Coleman Young. Young was a gifted politician who was able to eliminate the most egregious examples of racism, especially in the police and fire departments and City Hall. But he was unable to imagine a post-industrial society. So, for 14 years, he

tried in vain to woo industrial jobs back to Detroit.

In 1988, toward the end of his fourth term, Young decided that the factories weren't coming back and that Detroit's salvation depended on casino gambling, which he said would create 50,000 jobs.

To defeat his proposal, we organized Detroiters Uniting, a coalition of community groups, blue-collar, white-collar and cultural workers, clergy, political leaders and professionals.

Our concern was with how our city had been disintegrating socially, economically, politically, morally and ethically. We were convinced that we could not depend upon one industry or one large corporation to provide us with jobs. It was now up to us—the citizens of Detroit—to create meaningful jobs and income for all citizens.

We needed a new kind of city where citizens take responsibility for their decisions instead of leaving them to politicians or the marketplace.

Greening the Motor City

In 1992, to introduce this civic vision, we founded Detroit Summer, a multicultural, intergenerational youth movement and program to rebuild, redefine and re-spirit Detroit.

Youth volunteers began working on community gardens with Southern-born African-American elders who called themselves "Gardening Angels."

People were moved by the image of young people and elders reconnecting with one another and with the Earth. The result has been an escalating agricultural movement: neighborhood gardens, youth gardens, church gardens, school gardens, hospital gardens, senior independence gardens, wellness gardens and Kwanzaa gardens.

Capuchin monks have created Earthworks, a program that uses gardening to educate Detroit school children in the science, nutrition and biodiversity of organic agriculture, as well as to provide fresh produce for the Capuchin Soup Kitchen and for WIC (Women, Infants and Children) supplemental nutrition program.

At the Catherine Ferguson Academy—a public high school for pregnant teens and teenage mothers—students raise vegetables and fruit trees and grow alfalfa to feed the small animals that provide eggs, meat, milk and cheese for the school community.

Architectural students at University of Detroit Mercy produced a documentary called *Adamah* (Hebrew for "of the Earth") that envisions how a 2.5 square-mile area on the east side of Detroit could be developed into a self-reliant community with a vegetable farm, a tree farm and a sawmill to produce lumber.

Every August, the Detroit Agricultural Network conducts a tour of community gardens. After one such tour, one of my friends, a retired city planner, told me that it gave her a sense of how important community gardens are to a city, how they reduce neighborhood blight, build self-esteem among young people, and provide them with structured activities, build leadership skills, provide healthy

food and a community base for economic development.

"I see it as the quiet revolution," she said. "It is a revolution for self-determination taking place quietly in Detroit."

This quiet revolution has been preparing Detroiters to meet today's growing crises of global warming and spiraling food prices.

As writer Rebecca Solnit said in the July

responsible, active citizens we are capable of becoming.

We can begin by organizing ourselves in every city and community to secure a moratorium on foreclosures.

As food prices soar, we can achieve food security and better health by joining the local foods movement.

We can bring the neighbor back to

Detroit was once the national and international symbol of the miracle of industrialization. It is now the national and international symbol of the devastation of deindustrialization.

2007 issue of *Harper's*, "Detroit is where change is most urgent and therefore most viable. The rest of us will get there later, when necessity drives us too, and by that time Detroit may be the shining example we can look to—the post-industrial green city that was once the steel-gray capital of Fordist manufacturing."

What's next?

From my experience with the Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership, a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 in Detroit, I have seen and heard many stories of grassroots activities that Detroiters are creating—or want to create.

Because of these inspiring stories, in 2007 we launched the Detroit City of Hope campaign. Our aim was to identify, encourage and promote infrastructure-building initiatives:

- Expand urban agriculture and small businesses to create a sustainable local economy.
- Reinvent work so that it is not simply done for a paycheck but to develop people and build community.
- Reinvent education to include children in activities that transform themselves and their environment.
- Create co-ops to produce local goods for local needs.
- Replace punitive justice with restorative justice programs to keep non-violent offenders out of prison.

Working together as neighbors of all ages, we can evolve into the more socially

the 'hood by organizing "skills banks" to exchange goods and services among ourselves.

We can create home-repair teams to fix homes and/or tear down those beyond repair. The Electrical Workers, Carpenters and other unions can dedicate one day a week to work with community groups to rebuild whole neighborhoods, while also training young people in rebuilding skills to help them get jobs and recognize the dignity of work.

Other communities across the country are beginning to create alternative ways of living. In Milwaukee, a renaissance has begun, sparked by the two-acre farm of former basketball player Will Allen, who recently received a MacArthur Genius award. "We have to go back to when people shared things and started taking care of each other," Allen said recently. "That's the only way we will survive. What better way to do it than with food?"

These are only a small sample of what is possible once we recognize that a new local and sustainable economy is desirable and necessary.

Creating this new economy starts by accepting that there are no solutions except the ones we imagine and implement. ■

This article was excerpted from Grace Lee Boggs' keynote address at the National Lawyers Guild Convention in Detroit on Oct. 16, 2008. For information about the Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership, visit www.boggscenter.org.

ATTACK OF THE KILLER ROBOTS

The Pentagon's dream of a techno army is doomed to fail

BY ERIC STONER

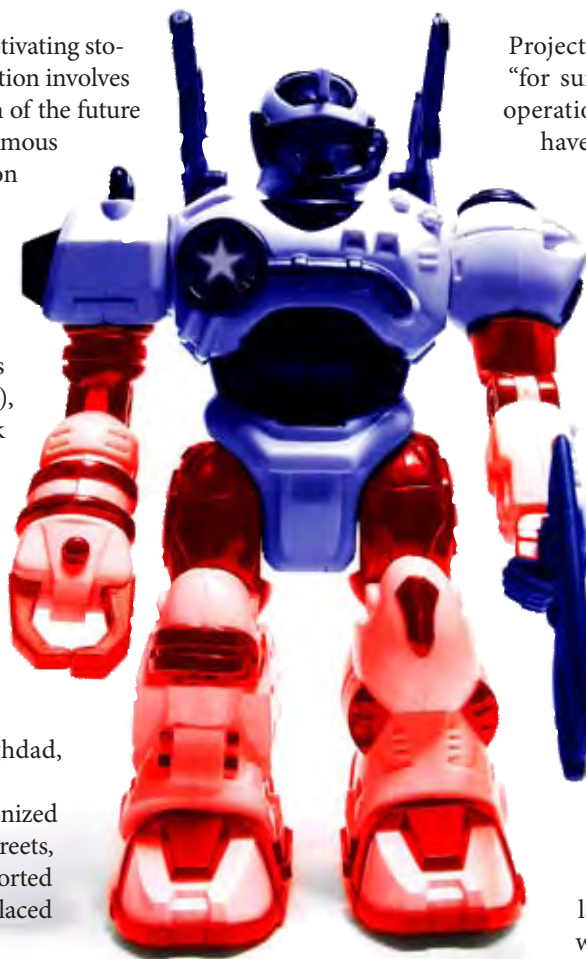
ONE OF THE MOST captivating storylines in science fiction involves a nightmarish vision of the future in which autonomous killer robots turn on their creators and threaten the extinction of the human race. Hollywood blockbusters such as *Terminator* and *The Matrix* are versions of this cautionary tale, as was *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*, the 1920 Czech play by Karel Capek that marked the first use of the word "robot."

In May 2007, the U.S. military reached an ominous milestone in the history of warfare—one that took an eerie step toward making this fiction a reality. After more than three years of development, the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division based south of Baghdad, deployed armed ground robots.

Although only three of these weaponized "unmanned systems" have hit Iraq's streets, to date, *National Defense* magazine reported in September 2007 that the Army has placed an order for another 80.

A month after the robots arrived in Iraq, they received "urgent material release approval" to allow their use by soldiers in the field. The military, however, appears to be proceeding with caution.

According to a statement by Duane Gotvald, deputy project manager of the Defense Department's Robotic Systems Joint



Project Office, soldiers are using the robots "for surveillance and peacekeeping/guard operations" in Iraq. By all accounts, robots have not fired their weapons in combat since their deployment more than a year and a half ago.

But it is only a matter of time before that line is crossed.

Future fighting force?

For many in the military-industrial complex, this technological revolution could not come soon enough.

Robots' strategic impact on the battlefield, however—along with the moral and ethical implications of their use in war—have yet to be debated.

Designed by Massachusetts-based defense contractor Foster-Miller, the Special Weapons Observation Remote Direct-Action System, or SWORDS, stands three feet tall and rolls on two tank treads.

It is similar to the company's popular TALON bomb disposal robot—which the U.S. military has used on more than 20,000 missions since 2000—except, unlike TALON, SWORDS has a weapons platform fixed to its chassis.

Currently fitted with an M249 machine gun that fires 750 rounds per minute, the robot can accommodate other powerful weapons, including a 40 mm grenade launcher or an M202

rocket launcher.

Five cameras enable an operator to control SWORDS from up to 800 meters away with a modified laptop and two joysticks. The control unit also has a special “kill button” that turns the robot off should it malfunction. (During testing, it had the nasty habit of spinning out of control.)

Developed on a shoestring budget of about \$4.5 million, SWORDS is a primitive robot that gives us but a glimpse of things to come. Future models—including several prototypes being tested by the military—promise to be more sophisticated.

Congress has been a steady backer of this budding industry, which has a long-term vision for technological transformation of the armed forces.

In 2001, the Defense Authorization Act directed the Pentagon to “aggressively develop and field” robotic systems in an effort to reach the ambitious goal of having one-third of the deep strike aircraft unmanned within 10 years, and one-third of the ground combat vehicles unmanned within 15 years.

To make this a reality, federal funding for military robotics has skyrocketed. From fiscal year 2006 through 2012, the government will spend an estimated \$1.7 billion on research for ground-based robots, according to the congressionally funded National Center for Defense Robotics. This triples what was allocated annually for such projects as recently as 2004.

The centerpiece of this roboticized fighting force of the future will be the 14 networked, manned and unmanned systems that will make up the Army’s Future Combat System—should it ever get off the ground. The creation of the weapons systems is also one of the most controversial and expensive the Pentagon has ever undertaken.

In July 2006, the Defense Department’s Cost Analysis Improvement Group estimated that its price tag had risen to more than \$300 billion—an increase of 225 percent over the Army’s original \$92 billion estimate in 2003, and nearly half of President Obama’s proposed stimulus package.

‘War in a can’

Despite the defense world’s excitement and the dramatic affect robots have on how war is fought, U.S. mainstream media coverage of SWORDS has been virtually nonexistent.

Worse, the scant attention these robots have received has often been little more than free publicity. *Time* magazine, for example, named SWORDS one of the “coolest inventions” of 2004. “Insurgents,

ary and extra pay for combat duty, the government invests a great deal in recruiting, training, housing and feeding each soldier. Not to mention the costs of healthcare and death benefits, should a soldier be injured or killed.

By comparison, the current \$245,000 price tag on SWORDS—which could drop to \$115,000 per unit if they are mass-produced—is a steal.

After attending a conference on mili-

**‘YOU DON’T WANT YOUR DEFENSES TO
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be afraid,” is how its brief puff piece began. And while most articles are not that one-sided, any skepticism is usually mentioned as a side note.

On the other hand, prior to the deployment of SWORDS, numerous arguments in their defense could regularly be found in the press. According to their proponents—generally the robot’s designers or defense officials—robots will not have any of the pesky weaknesses of flesh-and-blood soldiers.

“They don’t get hungry,” Gordon Johnson, who headed a program on unmanned systems at the Joint Forces Command at the Pentagon told the *New York Times* in 2005. “They’re not afraid. They don’t forget their orders. They don’t care if the guy next to them has just been shot. Will they do a better job than humans? Yes.”

Ronald Arkin, a leading roboticist at Georgia Tech, whose research the Defense Department funds, argues without a sense of irony that autonomous robots will be more humane than humans. Atrocities like the massacre by U.S. troops in Haditha, Iraq, would be less likely with robots, he told *The Atlanta* in November 2007, because they won’t have emotions that “cloud their judgment and cause them to get angry.”

Robots are also promoted as being cost-effective. On top of the annual sal-

tary robotics in Baltimore, journalist Steve Featherstone summed up their function in *Harper’s* in February 2007: “Robots are, quite literally, an off-the-shelf war-fighting capability—war in a can.”

And the most popular talking point in favor of armed robots is that they will save U.S. soldiers’ lives. To drive the point home, proponents pose this rhetorical question: Would you rather have a machine get blown up in Iraq, or your son or daughter?

Remove from reality

At first glance, these benefits of military robots sound sensible. But they fall apart upon examination.

Armed robots will be far from cost effective. Until these machines are given greater autonomy—which is currently a distant goal—the human soldier will not be taken out of the loop. And because each operator can now handle only one robot, the number of soldiers on the Pentagon’s payroll will not be slashed anytime soon. More realistically, SWORDS should best be viewed as an additional, expensive remote-controlled weapons system at the military’s disposal.

A different perspective is gained when the price of the robot is compared with the low-tech, low-cost weaponry that U.S. forces face on a daily basis in Iraq.

"You don't want your defenses to be so expensive that they'll bankrupt you," says Sharon Weinberger, a reporter for *Wired's* Danger Room blog. "If it costs us \$100,000 to defeat a \$500 roadside bomb, that doesn't sound like such a good strategy—as pretty as it may look on YouTube and in press releases."

The claim that robots would be more ethical than humans similarly runs contrary to both evidence and basic common sense.

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman writes in his 1996 book *On Killing* that despite the

portrayal in our popular culture of violence being easy, "There is within most men an intense resistance to killing their fellow man. A resistance so strong that, in many circumstances, soldiers on the battlefield will die before they can overcome it."

One of the most effective solutions to this quandary, the military has discovered, is to introduce distance into the equation. Studies show that the farther the would-be killer is from the victim, the easier it is to pull the trigger. Death and suffering become more sanitized—

the humanity of the enemy can be more easily denied. By giving the Army and Marines the capability to kill from greater distances, armed robots will make it easier for soldiers to take life without troubling their consciences.

The Rev. G. Simon Harak, an ethicist and the director of the Marquette University Center for Peacemaking, says, "Effectively, what these remote control robots are doing is removing people farther and farther from the consequences of their actions."

Moreover, the similarity that the robots have to the life-like video games that young people grow up playing will blur reality further.

"If guys in the field already have difficulties distinguishing between civilians and combatants," Harak asks, "what about when they are looking through a video screen?"

Rather than being a cause for concern, however, Maj. Michael Pottratz at the Army's Armament Research, Development and Engineering Center in Picatinny Arsenal, N.J., says in an e-mail that developers are in the process of making the control unit for the SWORDS more like a "Game Boy type controller."

It is not only possible but likely that a surge of armed robots would lead to an increase in the number of civilian casualties, not a decrease.

The supposed conversation-ender that armed robots will save U.S. lives isn't nearly as clear as it is often presented, either. "If you take a narrow view, fewer soldiers would die," Harak says, "but that would be only on the battlefield."

As happens in every war, however, those facing new technology will adapt to them.

"If those people being attacked feel helpless to strike at the robots themselves, they will try to strike at their command centers," Harak says, "which might well be back in the United States or among civilian centers. That would then displace the battlefield to manufacturing plants and research facilities at universities where such things are being invented or assembled... The whole notion that we can be invulnerable is just a delusion."



Top: A robot manned by a U.S. soldier from the 4th Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, patrols to check a suspected road side bomb in a street of Baghdad on Jan. 8, 2008. **Bottom:** A remotely-operated TALON robot prepares to defuse a roadside bomb during an IED-clearing mission by U.S. soldiers from Fox company, 4th squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment in western Baquba, northeast of Baghdad.

The new mercenaries

Even if gun-totting robots could reduce U.S. casualties, other dangerous consequences of their use are overlooked.

Frida Berrigan, a senior program associate at the New America Foundation's Arms and Security Initiative and *In These Times* contributing editor, argues that similar to the tens of thousands of unaccountable private security contractors in Iraq, robots will help those in power "get around having a draft, higher casualty figures and a real political debate about how we want to be using our military force."

In effect, by reducing the political capital at stake, robots will make it far easier for governments to start wars in the first place.

Since the rising U.S. death toll appears to be the primary factor that has turned Americans against the war—rather than its devastating economic costs or the far greater suffering of the Iraqi people—armed robots could also slow the speed with which future wars are brought to an end.

When Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) infamously remarked that he would be fine with staying in Iraq for 100 years, few noted that he qualified that statement by saying, "as long as Americans are not being injured or harmed or wounded or killed."

Robot soldiers will be similar to mercenaries in at least one more respect. They both serve to further erode the state's longstanding monopoly on the use of force.

"If war no longer requires people, and robots are able to conduct war or acts of war on a large scale, then governments will no longer be needed to conduct war," Col. Thomas Cowan Jr. wrote in a March 2007 paper for the U.S. Army War College. "Non-state actors with plenty of money, access to the technology and a few controllers will be able to take on an entire nation, particularly one which is not as technologically advanced."

This may not be farfetched.

In December 2007, *Fortune* magazine told the story of Adam Gettings, "a 25-year-old self-taught engineer," who started a company in Silicon Valley called Robotex. Within six months, the company built an armed robot similar to the SWORDS—

except that it costs a mere \$30,000 to \$50,000. And these costs will drop.

As this happens, and as the lethal technology involved becomes more accessible, Noel Sharkey, a professor of Artificial Intelligence and Robotics at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom, warns that it will be only a matter of time before extremist groups or terrorists develop and use robots.

PUT YOURSELF IN THE SHOES OF AN IRAQI. HOW COULD SEEING A ROBOT WITH A MACHINE GUN RUMBLE DOWN YOUR STREET OR POINT ITS WEAPON AT YOUR CHILD ILLICIT ANY REACTION OTHER THAN ONE OF TERROR OR ANGER?

Evidence now suggests that using armed robots to combat insurgencies would be counterproductive from a military perspective.

One study, published in the journal *International Organization* in June 2008, by Jason Lyall, an associate professor of international relations at Princeton, and Lt. Col. Isaiah Wilson III, who was the chief war planner for the 101st Airborne Division in Iraq and who currently teaches at West Point, looks at 285 insurgencies dating back to 1800.

After analyzing the cases, Lyall and Wilson conclude that the more mechanized a military is, the lower its probability of success.

"All counterinsurgent forces must solve a basic problem: How do you identify the insurgents hiding among noncombatant populations and deal with them in a selective, discriminate fashion?" Lyall writes in an e-mail.

To gain such knowledge, troops must cultivate relationships with the local population. This requires cultural awareness, language skills and, importantly, a willingness to share at least some of the same risks as the local population.

The *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, which was released in December 2006 and co-authored by Gen. David Petraeus, would seem to agree.

"Ultimate success in COIN [counterinsurgency] is gained by protect-

ing the populace, not the COIN force," the manual states. "If military forces remain in their compounds, they lose touch with the people, appear to be running scared, and cede the initiative to the insurgents."

Mechanized militaries, however, put greater emphasis on protecting their own soldiers. Consequently, Lyall and Wilson argue in their study that such

forces lack the information necessary to use force discriminately, and therefore, "often inadvertently fuel, rather than suppress, insurgencies."

Given such findings, deploying armed robots in greater numbers in Iraq or Afghanistan would likely only enflame resistance to the occupation, and, in turn, lead to greater carnage.

To understand this point, put yourself in the shoes of an Iraqi or Afghani. How could seeing a robot with a machine gun rumble down your street or point its weapon at your child illicit any reaction other than one of terror or extreme anger? What would you do under such circumstances? Who would not resist? And how would you know that someone is controlling the robot?

For all the Iraqis know, SWORDS is the autonomous killer of science fiction—American-made, of course.

The hope that killer robots will lower U.S. casualties may excite military officials and a war-weary public, but the grave moral and ethical implications—not to mention the dubious strategic impact—associated with their use should give pause to those in search of a quick technological fix to our woes.

By distancing soldiers from the horrors of war and making it easier for politicians to resort to military force, armed robots will likely give birth to a far more dangerous world. ■

BY SILJA J.A. TALVI

Our Town vs. Exxon

Riki Ott is unlike anyone you have met. A marine biologist with a subspecialty in water pollutants, Ott received her doctorate from the University of Washington and headed to Alaska, but not to take a university position. Instead, Ott fell in love with the wilderness, with

the water and with commercial fishing.

Cordova, an Alaskan town (population 2,500) nestled in the heart of Prince William Sound, has been her home for more than 20 years. Largely untouched by mainland American culture, Cordova's residents were happy to keep to themselves and their wondrous natural surroundings, and Ott felt right at home.

That changed on March 24, 1989—the day everything turned black. Black, as in the oil coating the beaches, rocks and waterfowl gasping for breath, spilling out of the *Exxon Valdez*.

Exxon assured the residents of Cordova, and the rest of the world, that the largest oil spill in U.S. history was under control. Later, the corporation announced that wildlife, fish and human populations in places like Cordova and Valdez were making a full recovery.

Not One Drop: Betrayal and Courage in the Wake of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill (Chelsea Green, November) sets the record straight. The real damage, as Ott reveals in her extensively documented, visceral account of pre- and post-spill life in Cordova, extended far beyond legions of dead fish and birds washing up on beaches.

Ott, one of the primary figures willing to stand up to Big Oil before and after the spill, took on a community leadership role that she never envisioned. Retired

from fishing and from the “objective” world of science, Ott sought instead to bring a voice to the people of Prince William Sound, whose very way of life stood at the brink of extinction. In the process, she helped to transform the region's destiny from one of self-implosion to self-actualization.

In *These Times* spoke with Ott about “invisible losses,” the shift from victim to survivor mode, and the battle against corporate rights.

In *Not One Drop*, you write that the damages caused by the oil spill was far more toxic than the obvious damage to the environment and the local economy. You write of the “invisible losses” that the community incurred. Can you elaborate?

The truth is that Cordova gutted itself after the spill, especially after our fish runs collapsed in 1992 and 1993. The stress manifested itself in all manner of horrible things, including substance abuse, alcohol abuse, domestic abuse, depression, PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder], isolation, divorce and suicide. These are the so-called “non-economic losses” in a court of law.

For sociologists who came in and studied us after the spill, Cordova became a case study of what happens when a whole community of people is traumatized. We had a massive increase in PTSD in Cordova, as well as general anxiety disorder, and,

of course, this trickled down to the kids. We're very tight with the children here, and we have always taught them as a community, not just as individuals. Some of these kids own fishing boats when they're 15 and 16, and it's the same thing with the native people of this region, with an emphasis on subsistence harvesting, sharing and celebrating resources. We don't have ageism in Cordova, it's a very fluid sharing of life across the generations.

So, the adults here were plunged into this situation, and the kids were, as well. The younger generation saw their mothers and fathers change drastically. This external, financial hardship ate people up internally, and the stress manifested in all manner of horrible things. People stopped visiting their friends and family members. Divorces and suicides went up. It was an ongoing disaster.

How did you begin to recover?

After our fish runs collapsed, we had nothing more to lose. When you reach that point, it's very freeing ... you have only each other. You look around at people, your neighbors, and you say, “What are we going to do?” There were groups of people who sat down and started to talk with each other about the possible solutions, the changes we needed to make to our economy and in our own emotional lives.

We had to rebuild our whole reality. Eventually, the way to mitigate this kind of harm is to shift people from victim to survivor mode. We inadvertently created what the sociologists came to study and call “peer listening circles.” This same approach was then used with the survivors of Katrina.

We began to form nonprofit organizations to deal with the grief, the cultural and social damage. It started to draw us out of this bubble of misery. We began to



Riki Ott documents the damage—environmental and social—that the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill wrought on Cordova, Alaska.

PETER DIANTONI

figure out how to diversify our economy without opting for short-term solutions. There were, for instance, proposals to strip-mine, which were ultimately rejected because we would have trashed our chances for future fisheries.

Instead, we began working on building a sustainable economy, and realizing that this is about getting off oil. In order to have a livable planet and pass something onto the next generations, we absolutely have to transition off oil. There's no other choice.

Out of that effort came "The Copper River Watershed Project" to support the growth of local fishery, sustainable forestry and tourism over 26,500 square miles, encompassing one of the last, intact watersheds in North America. Among many other goals, we sought to protect salmon and upriver habitat from widespread clearcutting.

In March, it will have been 20 years since the spill. Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court slashed the restitution that Exxon was to have paid spill victims and their surviving families, from \$5 billion to just \$507 million. How do the oil spill survivors feel about this, and what are the broader implications of the court decision?

It was devastating. That's just 10 percent of the original award, and for the survivors, it will result in bankruptcies, foreclosures, and people having to sell their homes and move away.

The jury didn't pull \$5 billion from the air. They determined that this was the amount of one year's worth of net profit for Exxon, and that's what it would take to punish the corporation for the damage to our community. More than 6,000 people eventually lost their livelihoods because of the spill.

What the Supreme Court did was to decide that a one-to-one ratio of compensatory damages was just punishment under maritime law. So, Exxon's "punishment" was reduced to four days of net profit, instead of one year's worth. For them, this is not punishment. It's the victory of "corporate."

As for the broader implications, this is a crucial question for our times right now. We need to see how it was, historically, that this flagrant corporate greed was allowed to triumph.

When this country was founded, people were still considered property. It took two popular uprisings to eventually

drive through the constitutional amendments to determine that, legally, people are *not* property. Now, the pendulum has swung in the other direction, and we have made property and corporations equal to people, in the eyes of the law. By we, I mean the federal judiciary, and what I consider to be an informal, back-door amendment to the Constitution through [subsequent] judicial interpretation of an 1886 U.S. Supreme Court decision [*Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad Company*], which has resulted in the idea that due process and equal protection should be extended to corporations, as though they were individual citizens.

Since 1886, corporations have taken this and run with it—and run right through the First Amendment, as well, so that money equals speech. More money, more speech, and that has enabled the corruption of our entire election process, our whole political process. The usurpation of rights intended for people has also run right through their Fourth Amendment, prohibiting warrantless search.

For instance, if you're a meatpacker and there are questions of OSHA violations, or if you're a corporate player in an industry that is plagued with unlawful air or water pollutants and the EPA wants to take a closer look, [government inspectors] can't just barge in. They actually have to have a warrant now, and let the corporation know that they're coming, as though the corporation were a person. How many corporate criminals are you going to catch if you warn them that you're coming?

We, the people, need to say, "This has gone too far." And we must drive in what I propose as the 28th Amendment, to strip corporations of this false "personhood."

For too long, we have allowed our laws, this concept of "corporate rights," to trump human rights. We don't have disposable people or a disposable planet. Corporations, in an unchecked run to maximize profits, are trashing lifestyles, cultures and ecosystems around this planet and, in the process, they are eroding the human relationships that form the basis for a civil society. ■



Benicio Del Toro stars in the title role of Steven Soderbergh's *Che*. The four-hour anti-biopic hits theaters on Jan. 24.

TERESA ISASI

BY BEN KENIGSBURG

Che the Man, Not the T-shirt

All biographical films garner charges of omissions; director Steven Soderbergh's *Che* actively courts them. The worst way to approach this two-part, four-and-a-half-hour anti-biopic is to see it as a film expressly *about* Ernesto "Che" Guevara.

Those who expect a full portrait of the man will be confronted with a film that boldly declines to imagine its subject's psychology or personal life. Those who expect a hagiography will be surprised to find that the film consists of nearly four and a half hours of grueling guerrilla tactics.

When I interviewed Soderbergh at the Toronto International Film Festival in September, he said that one of his goals was to pick scenes that would occur "before or after the scene[s] that you would typically

see in a movie like this." Soderbergh has also suggested to the press that the film's real subject is political engagement—that is, what it means to truly commit to an ideology. It's one thing to promise hospitals and food; it's quite another to march through the jungle for more than a year in the name of overhauling a society.

It's true that *Che*—which focuses exclusively on Guevara's Cuba and Bolivia campaigns—offers little counterargument to those looking for a more critical examination. By design, the Cuba-Bolivia

contrast problematically skips over the period from roughly 1959 to 1965, which saw Che's brutality as Castro's commander-executioner at La Cabaña fortress in Havana and his persecution of dissidents and homosexuals. In A.O. Scott's *New York Times* review, the critic chastised the film for failing to offer a "moral reckoning."

But if that omission seems troublesome, it's worth considering that the movie omits almost everything else—context, character, even drama. Its approach to history is largely on a footnote level: The narrative emerges obliquely, and major figures remain confined to the margins.

The dialectical structure attempts to be true to Marxist ideas—in form as well as content. The movie's two halves adopt different color schemes, different tempos, different approaches to chronology and even different aspect ratios, contrasting two revolutions similar in theory but markedly different in outcome. The first campaign succeeds. In the second, Che's asthma acts up, the Bolivian government's counterpropaganda works and the peasants fail to rally to his cause—a combination of factors that ultimately lead to Che's capture and, on Day 341, his execution.

Che: Part One's first chronological scene finds Che (a powerfully reserved Benicio Del Toro) meeting Castro (Demián Bichir) in Mexico City in 1955. They board the *Granma*, their boat to Cuba, and from then on, the film depicts the march through the Sierra Maestra mountains to Santa Clara, the site of the guerrillas' decisive battle.

Soderbergh alternates between this process and Che's 1964 visit to the United Nations, using an interview with TV journalist Lisa Howard (an offscreen Julia Ormond) as voiceover. In both chronologies, Soderbergh takes pains to depict Che externally, presenting him as he presented himself to others and ostensibly deriving his speeches from actual oratory and writings.

Although there are dramatic peaks in the march—a clash with Castro over how to deal with factionalism, the siege of Santa Clara—*Che: Part One* focuses on scenes

of recruiting peasants, treating the sick and chastising weary soldiers. The movie approaches Che through indirection, and the darker, intransigent side of his ideology can be seen in the protesters visible at the United Nations or in Che's call to execute a deserter before the soldier can

sisted on adding Cuba as a counterpoint, eschews Malick's poetry in favor of cold, meticulous indexing.

From Cannes, *Village Voice* critic J. Hoberman described *Che* as being about "the nature of objective camera work." Although the scoring isn't ambient, *Che* es-

By focusing on the specifics of jungle warfare, the film insists that you confront the physical insanity of what Che did. The movie is too detached and clinical to be said to condone his actions.

make a final confession.

It's suggestive of the film's approach that after its Cannes premiere in May, Soderbergh removed a scene involving the trial of Lalo Sardiñas, a captain who faced execution after he shot a soldier who he was disciplining. The debate over whether to execute Sardiñas made for one of the film's most compelling and arguably ideological scenes, but the net effect of the removal is to make the film's structure even more uniform: less punctuated, less didactic, more physical.

The second half may be even more perverse in its lack of signposting. It begins with Che disguising himself and ascending into the mountains of Bolivia. Viewers who go in without knowledge of Mario Monje (Lou Diamond Phillips), the Bolivian Communist Party leader who reneged his support for Che, won't receive much context for his decision, while the CIA's dealings with Bolivian President René Barrientos have an elliptical quality that suggests '70s paranoid thrillers like *The Parallax View*.

In this half of the film, *Che* periodically cedes screen time to the collective. Even more so than in its Cuba sections, the film here relentlessly focuses on the process over the person.

Che originated in the hands of Terrence Malick, who as a young journalist was reportedly covering Guevara in Bolivia at the time of his capture. Malick would likely have been more diffuse in his approach, while Soderbergh, who in-

entially attempts to film the unfilmable—to show you what a guerrilla might have seen and heard.

The question, of course, is why bother? What's the point of making a movie longer than *Gone with the Wind* that leaves its subject an enigma? But it's hard to see how *Che* simplifies Che any more than a crowd-pleaser like *The Motorcycle Diaries* or, for that matter, a Che Guevara T-shirt. Quite the opposite.

Soderbergh's *Che* attempts to confront the notion of bolstering Che as an icon. What does it mean to stand for Che? By focusing so relentlessly on the specifics of jungle warfare, the film insists that you confront the physical insanity of what Che attempted to do. (The movie is too detached and clinical to be said to condone his actions.) By zeroing in on detail at the expense of broader context, *Che* is also implicitly a film about the ethics—and inherent shortcomings—of historical movies.

There's an element of admiration in Soderbergh's portrait of Che, though perhaps not for typical reasons. In *Film Comment* magazine, critic Amy Taubin suggested that the film is essentially an allegory for guerrilla filmmaking—and indeed, a movie this wonky and withholding would, on paper, seem to have little commercial prospect in the United States. But it's the movie's refusal to compromise that's so unusual. What makes *Che* incomplete as history is what makes it arresting as cinema. ■

FILM

A Massacre in 3/4 Time

By Michael Atkinson

ARGUABLY THE MOST unique film to come out of any global corner in 2008, filmmaker Ari Folman's *Waltz with Bashir* can be defined, just on its surface, as a head-shaking fugue between social documentary and digitally animated epic.

But as you'd expect, given the inherent contradictions, it is significantly more: It's Israeli, for one thing, and it's a direct cinematic address of the 1982 massacre of Palestinian civilians in the West Beirut refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, for another.

And can a documentary be animated? The moment you create a film frame by frame, out of the stressed cloth of memory, how close could it be to the truth?

"Which truth?" Folman would surely ask right back, and *Waltz with Bashir* brilliantly echoes its cultural investigations with its formal contradictions.

The aspect of the film that hits you first, in the eyeballs, is its visual torque. From the opening, of a pack of ravenous, fanged dogs running through the Tel Aviv streets under a stormy yellow sky—drawn and animated with high-contrast, nightmarish surreality—it becomes clear that *Bashir* looks and feels unlike any other film. It is difficult to pin down exactly *how* the film—which began its U.S. run on Christmas Day—was manufactured, and the disarming, solitary visual tide of it is enough to brand it upon your brain. For a subjective portrait of the lysergic experience of war, it's relentlessly amazing.

The dogs are part of a dream—the dream of an Israeli soldier who, during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, couldn't shoot people, so he was given the thankless task of shooting watchdogs, all 26 of which hunt him in his dreams. The soldier is just one compatriot sought out by Folman, who, 25 years after serving in the Israeli army and being present for the '82 massacre, cannot remember a thing about it.



Waltz with Bashir explores nightmares of the Israeli-condoned, 1982 massacre of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

So he interviewed friends from that time, and friends of friends, to find out what happened and, by extension, why he has suppressed the memories. The interviews became the fulcrum of the feature, as animated versions of very real people speak with an animated Folman about the invasion and about the heady days of Israeli empowerment under former Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

Most of Folman's film visualizes those reminiscences, vividly captured in a dazzling, almost exhausting cataract of visual invention. The tableaux—entire landscapes scorched by bombings, a downed pilot's lost-at-sea hallucination of a giant naked woman, an international airport wrecked and abandoned after an aerial attack, a lingering stream of blood running from the back door of an armored vehicle—could hardly have been rendered so energetically, or indeed rendered at all, in a modestly budgeted live-action film. Points of view are always shifting, time frames meld, what the soldiers think they saw supplants the reality.

Manners of seeing—and of interpretation—are at the heart of the movie's many recurring metaphors. Folman's own repeated dream image (one of the few that persist) is of fiery lights falling softly from the night sky. Various characters remember the lights as rocket fire and a meteor shower, but only later do we (and Folman's avatar) understand

what they are: flares the Israeli soldiers shot to illuminate the sky above the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, passively allowing the Lebanese members of the right-wing Phalange Party to carry out their bloody work.

Given a little thought, profound Israeli guilt seeps out of the film's title. The history behind it plays like an escalation paradigm: Less than a month after Israel had invaded Lebanon in 1982 to assault Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) strongholds, Syrian operatives assassinated the newly and narrowly elected Christian militia leader (and Israel gladiator) Bashir Gemayel. As retribution, two days later, Gemayel's Phalangist militias, with the cooperation of the occupying Israelis, slaughtered 2,000 Palestinian refugees—an act that dwarfed the PLO's car bombings in every way and drew international scorn. Like a waltz partner, the Israeli army (all young, naive conscripts) was close but did not touch, leading but otherwise merely following the music and the proscribed dance steps.

After too many recent Israeli films (including quite a few good ones) that waffle about the Israeli-Palestinian question, and that too often adopt a *Crash*-like, can't-we-just-get-along centrism, it's exhilarating to see a politically aware film in full attack mode, using disorienting cinematic tools but emerging as an unfettered critique of militarism.

As Stuart Klawans recently pointed out in *Film Comment* magazine, it may seem disproportionate to hang the film on the retrospective angst of Jewish soldiers and not on the massacre victims themselves. But Folman's film is much more of an interrogation than a plea for sympathy. (In fact, I suspect that Folman didn't actually forget all that much, and invented his own forgetfulness to abet the film's structure.)

In any case, the climactic passage reverts to stock footage of the dead refugees—including children's body parts jutting out of rubble, exactly as discussed by the animated characters earlier—and our questions, about where our empathy is supposed to land, simply dry up and blow away.

It may not, in the end, be a documentary at all, but as revelatory a social document as Middle Eastern cinema has ever produced. It certainly could not have arrived at a more pungent moment, as Gaza explodes and Palestinian civilians again face monstrous reprisals. ■

BOOKS

Not All Happy Families are Nuclear

By Mandy Van Deven

IN *ANNA KARENINA*, Tolstoy wrote “all happy families are alike.” He was wrong.

In *One Big Happy Family: 18 Writers Talk About Polyamory, Open Adoption, Mixed Marriage, Househusbandry, Single Motherhood, and Other Realities of Truly Modern Love* (Riverhead, February), we meet 18 families that could not be more different from one another, each demonstrating that healthy families come in a variety of configurations.

Rebecca Walker, the book's editor, describes in the introduction her process in choosing these extraordinary pieces, writing, “I was looking for stability, complexity, longevity and overall happiness. When I saw those four elements in a family, no matter what it looked like, I

paid closer attention.”

Walker is no stranger to nontraditional families. Her own childhood was spent being passed back and forth every two years between her father's home in New York and her famous mother's—Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*—home in San Francisco. She has said the experience left her longing for the “stability” that was absent in her life.

In the introduction, Walker writes about her romantic relationships and how the birth of her son made her realize the responsibility she had in filling the void within herself, as well as in figuring out what she wanted her own family to look like: “Our only option is to think deeply about every step, move forward with discipline and an eye toward longevity and the greater good, and have faith that we have done the right thing. If 10 years pass and our family is thriving, we know we've made good decisions. If 10 years pass and it's falling apart, well, we can credit our decisions for that, too.”

[art space]



LIVING IN AMERICA

As America embarks on what many hope will be a new era of democracy, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in Chicago is offering an artists' take.

“USA Today” is a collection of MCA works from the '80s and '90s that focuses on art's role in contemporary political and social issues, such as globalization, race relations and self-expression.

“We're trying to show the power of art in a democracy,” says co-curator Tricia Van Eck.

The exhibit features a variety of media, including drawings, photography, video and installations. Pictured at left is Robert Heineken's V.N. Pinup (#1 of 2), a black and white film transparency on magazine paper. “USA Today” runs through March 15. For more information, visit mcachicago.org.

—Ben Strauss

The challenge of any anthology is to represent the topic while maintaining the reader's attention and not spreading itself too thinly by attempting to cover everything there is to say on the matter—a challenge often unmet in a collection of so many authors' stories that vary in technique, tone, intention and perspective. The purposeful placement of each work and the personal narrative format create a continuity that allows the reader to move seamlessly from one story to the next, while the topical and stylistic variety maintains interest.

The anthology begins with what some may consider the book's most radical piece, Jenny Block's "And Then We Were Poly." Instead of Block approaching her polyamorous lifestyle as one on the fringe, she normalizes her relationships with her husband and girlfriend by pointing out the many ways in which they mimic monogamous couplings, addressing the questions she has no doubt been asked numerous times: How did you decide to be polyamorous? Does your husband get jealous of your girlfriend? How do you explain your relationships to your daughter?

Block doesn't get bogged down in the different types of poly arrangements, and she's not proselytizing, either. She simply speaks her piece and lets the reader sort out the rest.

The need to give priority to open communication and honesty—with one's self and others—is a recurring theme throughout the book. Such honesty can facilitate a broken heart, as is the case in asha bande's "Woman Up." bande tells the story of how she fell in love with, and married, a man in prison, later giving birth to their child. She writes with raw sincerity about the wounds she carries, knowing that her maternal joy is a constant reminder of her husband's forced absence from both her and their daughter's lives.

In "DJ's Homeless Mommy" and "Sharing Madison," Dan Savage and Dawn Friedman recount, respectively, their experiences as parents of adopted children. Both write about the challenges of maintaining a relationship with their child's birth mother—in Savage's case, a homeless-by-choice street kid, and in Friedman's, a 19-year-old college student who did not want a child

to derail her dreams. The authors also relay the mistakes they make in coming to terms with their role as the child's parent.

For example, when Savage and his partner explain to their 3-year-old son that the reason his birth mother smells badly is because she doesn't have a home in which to bathe or wash her clothes, they quickly learn the meaning of "age appropriate information," as the child reacts with panic for his birth mother's safety.

In "Home Alone Together," Neal Pollock writes a hilarious piece on the domestic division of labor between him and his wife—from who washes the dishes to who cooks dinner to who takes care of "the kid."

Pollock's humorous explanation of his family's hodgepodge arrangement stands in stark contrast with Marc and Amy Vachon's methodically 50-50 split in duties in "Half the Work, All the Fun." (Yes, they even co-wrote the essay!)

Other noteworthy stories are written by Liza Monroy, Susan McKinney de Ortega and Amy Anderson. Monroy married her gay best friend in Las Vegas to prevent him from being deported to a country where "gay sex was considered criminal behavior," she writes. For years, she hid information about the marriage from her mother, a foreign diplomat. McKinney de Ortega's story involves her rejection of middle-class American values in favor of a life in Mexico with a man 15 years her junior. And Anderson's story tells of her attempt to move from a multicultural family of 12, in which

she grew up, to an all-white family of four.

Race is addressed openly in several pieces, most profoundly in ZZ Packer's anger-inducing essay on mothering a mixed-race son who resembles the child's other parent. I cringed while reading the ignorant comments of white moms, many of whom assumed that Packer was her son's nanny, and I sympathized with her disappointment in black people's praise of his "good hair" and light skin.

The political and social analyses in this book are largely spot-on. The authors don't shy away from difficult subjects. They simply lay bare their perspectives—which do not always align—to make clear the myriad ways our society's popular familial construction has been refigured over time.

With the recent passage of California's Proposition 8—which banned marriage equality in the state—and the ban against same-sex adoption in several Southern states, there is no better time to discuss how the definition of "family" no longer mimics a nuclear model. One needs dig no deeper than the celebrity gossip pages to see how long-term unmarried couples, transnational adoption and divorce are expanding our definitions of love and family.

Walker's anthology provides a modern look at the relationships Tolstoy depicted in his famous 1877 novel, relationships that were dynamic even then, and that will continue to gain legitimacy through our own lived experimentation with unscripted domesticity. ■



One Big Happy Family shows us that healthy families come in all configurations.

BOOKS

In Mexico, Resistance is Utile

By Kari Lydersen

FOR ANYONE WHO has felt confused, confounded, disappointed, disturbed and yet still enchanted by Mexico, John Gibler's *Mexico Unconquered: Chronicles of Power and Revolt* (City Lights, January) offers some relief.

Gibler, an independent journalist who has lived in Mexico since December 2005, starts by deconstructing the idea that Mexico's history is a tale of total conquest by Spanish conquistadors or succeeding waves of military, political and economic invaders. Instead, he describes a country never fully vanquished, albeit one still affected by colonization in the last half century—through trade policies and economic pressure rather than military might. "If the conquest is still ongoing," Gibler writes, "there are people and places that remain unconquered."

Gibler has been present during defining moments in Mexican politics of the last few years, including the Zapatistas' "La Otra" campaign, the Oaxaca teachers' strike, and the violent clashes in San Salvador Atenco over the government's plan to build an airport that would displace hundreds of *campesinos*.

Gibler's interpretation of a "Mexico unconquered" testifies to the urgency of current struggles, and celebrates the fierce spirit of Mexican resistance, past and present. Resistance movements, Gibler notes, "take on an anti-colonial dimension" and lead "to bold, creative, massive and energetic social participation. Mexico's class war is a fight against the ongoing conquest, a social struggle for dignity and autonomy."

The book adeptly gives us a crash course in Mexico's history through this lens. Gibler briefly yet effectively describes the perversion and historical revisionism of the 1910 Mexican Revolution by the PRI party, which used it as a calling cry during its seven-decade authoritarian reign. Though the PRI continued to give lip service to the Revolution's goals of land re-

form and rights for the poor, in reality it has long been characterized by corruption, brutal oppression, blatant thievery and the imposition of neoliberal economic reforms completely opposite to the supposed spirit of the Revolution.

"The Revolution forms the symbolic foundation of Mexican nationalism, the shape-shifting ideology claimed in various forms by every national political party and social movement in the country," Gibler writes.

Gibler also questions the lionization of revolutionary Gen. Lázaro Cárdenas, even by many on the left. He notes that, despite Cárdenas' championing of land reform and nationalization, he was the "true genius behind the PRI's monopoly capitalism." Gibler describes how Cárdenas co-opted the labor movement and other mass organizations and won over the military and the Catholic Church while sidelining peasants and more progressive forces.

"Cárdenas did not simply buy off movement leaders," Gibler notes. "[H]e first convinced them with very real political actions, thus pulling them deeply into

the arms of the State."

Gibler defines Mexico as a country not ruled by law but rather by brute force and shameless authority. As forceful illustrations, he points to the violent and pervasive drug trade, as well as the shocking government attacks on protesters at San Salvador Atenco.

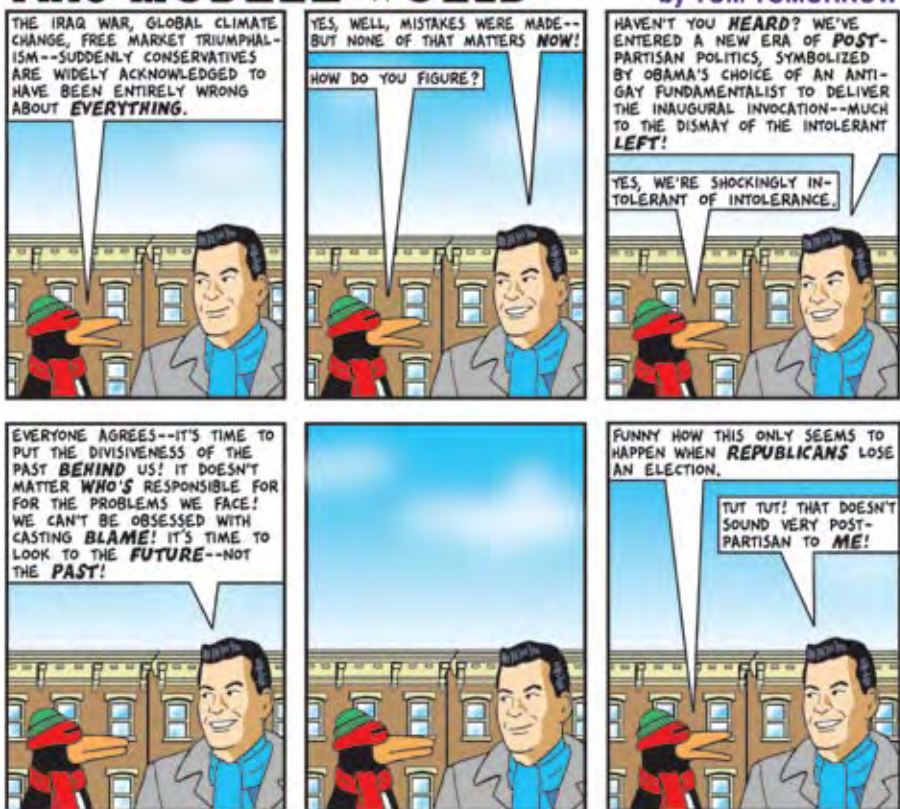
In this case, Gibler finds himself somewhat at odds with major human rights groups. He writes that arguments for reforms are based on pushing Mexico to comply with its own laws, when in reality, the country's laws—though enshrined on paper—have never had much power or meaning. And in the broader sense, he insinuates the whole human rights framework is an exercise in futility because it fails to address the roots of the problem—strong-arm oppression based on race and class.

Such provocative ideas are more hinted at than fleshed out, which could be seen as either a weakness in *Mexico Unconquered* or a preview of his future writings.

Likewise, Gibler pokes at the arguments of immigrants rights activists who call for

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



amnesty and immigration reform, noting that the hemorrhaging of Mexico's population is so massive and systematic that it cannot be described as the natural desire of populations to move and flow.

He also challenges how the Mexican government and foreign institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund define "poverty," seeing it partly as a means to impose neoliberal programs.

With the premise of an unconquered country still fighting the battle against colonization and exploitation, Gibler draws parallels (both spelled out and subtly implied) from centuries of Mexican history to ongoing and recent struggles, such as the 2006 Other Campaign ("La Otra Campaña") of the Zapatistas and Oaxaca's state of virtual war the past few years. Running throughout this analysis is the theme of how class warfare and racism are braided together in exploitation and oppression.

Gibler describes how former Mexican President Porfirio Díaz's "racism was both official policy and buried in his development model: using railway expansion as a means to dispossess indigenous communities and force the conversion of subsistence farmers to wage laborers." Although Díaz reigned a century ago, the connections between his scheme and current multinational development and transit projects—like the controversial Plan Puebla Panamá industrial "dry canal," which is displacing rural communities across a wide swath of the country—cannot be missed.

Gibler also examines the U.S. role in the ongoing conquest of Mexico, including the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the preceding wave of privatization that made it possible. NAFTA, which took effect in 1994, allowed U.S. companies to take advantage of cheap labor that manufactured electronics, textiles and medical products across the border. At the same time, the United States flooded Mexican markets with agricultural exports—such as heavily subsidized corn—that undermined Mexico's local agrarian economies.

The resulting job loss created more available workers for the U.S.-owned *maquiladoras* (factories) in Mexican

excerpt



GETTING PLAYED BY THE LOTTO

The following excerpt is from The Lottery Wars: Long Odds, Fast Money, and the Battle Over an American Institution (Bloomsbury, March) by Matthew Sweeney. Even as the world's economy reels, private lottery companies are making out like bandits, thanks in part to our politicians:

Lotteries seem an odd fit for a government operation because they are. In fact, much of the work is handed out in contracts to private companies that specialize in running lotteries. The two biggest in the United States are GTECH and Scientific Games. GTECH dominates the lotto and number-picking games by supplying software and computer terminals and management expertise to states. Scientific Games controls the scratch-tickets market in most states. But as aggressively as the two compete for state contracts, GTECH is, easily, the bigger of the two. And it is growing bigger. It accurately calls itself the worldwide lottery leader.

On Oct. 17, 2006, GTECH Holdings Corporation cut the ribbon on its new glass-and-steel headquarters in downtown Providence, R.I. ... Since the company's creation, it has consistently hired people for their political muscle. After all, the lottery business is as much about negotiating the intricacies of state bylaws and access to those with control over contracts as it is about gambling and new technologies. GTECH executives knew not to be stingy about it, spending millions on lobbying whenever it counted. Everywhere GTECH went it seemed to absorb politicians, their staff members and state lottery employees onto its payroll. A few months after the ribbon cutting, the company hired the former chief of staff to Providence's Mayor David Cicilline to work under [the company's vice president for government relations Donald] Sweitzer. On the other side of the political fence, the company has also hired lobbyist Charlie Black, a Republican Party insider and adviser to Sen. John McCain's 2008 campaign. ...

The company claims more than \$1.25 billion in annual revenue and 5,000 employees in 50 countries. Its numbers are impressive, as is the efficiency and skill with which it runs the online lotto games in 25 of the 42 state lotteries. ...



Its financial achievements are perhaps overshadowed by its equally intimidating reputation. Over the last four decades, GTECH has earned a reputation not only as the leader of the worldwide lottery industry, but as a politically wired company with one of the most aggressive, and on occasion illegal, lobbying operations in the country. Wherever GTECH sought contracts, public officials, and sometimes the company, seemed to get into trouble. There may be no other company with so many government contacts that has such an extensive rap sheet of indictments, convictions, and accusations of fraud and abuse.

border cities and fueled the flow of undocumented Mexican workers willing to work for low wages and no benefits in the United States.

The situation is perhaps best summed up by a doctor Gibler meets, who moved to the United States but was one of relatively few to return to his hometown.

"I think that the United States' plan is

to make Mexico into a kind of colony," says Manuel Valadez López. "People go to the United States to work and earn dollars. They come back to Mexico and spend their dollars on American products. It's a nice, round business. Everyone here depends on the United States. If this isn't a colony, then how do you define colony?" ■

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

Forget Marriage—Civil Unions For All



BELIEVE
FERVENTLY IN
the sanctity of
marriage, and
if you do, too, head
immediately to
your closest church,
mosque, synagogue
or flying spaghetti
monster chapel, and

sign up to procreate, cohabit and copulate with a sex partner blessed by that holy institution.

But pass city hall and do not collect \$200 in tax breaks. In fact, given the intrinsic rewards of sanctity, it's pretty greedy to demand any secular perks from the state. Eternal life at the feet of the old white guy and his hench-angels should be prize enough.

Making your marriage sacred should be between you and your godly thing.

Making your union legal, on the other hand, should be between you and state-guaranteed legal and human rights. And it should be available to any two people, gay or straight, in whatever configuration: Mother and son, grandparent and grand-kid, mother and daughter, and best friends should all be able to form legal couples that enjoy the rights, privileges, financial benefits and responsibilities now assigned to marriage. (Calm down Rev. Rick: Only two people, no pets allowed.)

America's current marriage system, even when it includes same-sex couples, inherently discriminates against millions of people who are not in a sexual relationship. (That many legal marriages are platonic only adds irony to injustice.) Ensuring equal rights for all requires relegating or elevating (however you look at it) marriage

to the realm of religion. Kind of like christenings, bar mitzvahs and chicken sacrifice.

The state's job, then, would be to assign benefits, if any, to couples, but not to define who can enter into coupledness. There is no rational, as opposed to religious, reason why any two people shouldn't be able to form a civil union that carries the same rights as marriage: to pass on and inherit property, make decisions for the sick, visit inmates and get discounts on Carnival cruises.

Without the religious framework, joining civil, secular rights to heterosexual or even gay coupledness becomes bizarre. Think about it: To enjoy the tax and other benefits of marriage (or its gay stepchild, current civil unions), a couple is assumed to have consummated the deal with sex—with each other.

But why shouldn't any practical or loving couple be able to form a unit and consummate it with anything they choose? A night at the opera, a day at the races, a signature on a will?

Irrational fear and religion (but I repeat myself) underlie the state's stance that it can assign secular rights to a sacred institution designed for sexual partners—and can exclude platonic couples. But really, would the legal right to shared Social Security benefits so excite two heterosexual women that they would turn lesbian? Would allowing two brothers to share medical benefits inspire them to acts of incest?

Or would, God forbid, too many people get health benefits and share incomes and resources?

Tradition is another bulwark against change. But even traditions that appear carved in stone or mandated by God evolve over time like Darwin's

finches. "Traditional" marriage used to be a business contract between families. It legitimized procreative sex and formalized property and inheritance. It was often polygamous and included child spouses. Men's conjugal rights included rape and the rule of thumb—the right to beat a wife with a stick no thicker than his thumb.

Gradually, many societies embraced an ideal of romantic love that undermined arranged marriages, while women's increasing legal, sexual and financial independence undercut marriage as society's mechanism of choice for promoting the lawful and peaceful transition of property.

Today, people—including women—can leave their property to whomever they wish, and they can rely on DNA tests rather than the friable sanctity of marriage if they wish to base their decisions on bloodlines. But they still cannot define the most legally significant relationships of their lives.

Rather than simply fighting the Religious Right's campaign to stop gay marriage and weaken the church-state divide, progressives could take a more radical approach. Gay and straight, they could demand an unbridgeable chasm between state and mate.

If you want a sanctified marriage, exchange vows at a religious institution that accepts you. Heaven and sanctified sex await.

But if you want that bond to be legal, wait in line at city hall with the farmer and his son, the grandmother and orphaned grandchild, the elderly widows, all of whom deserve better healthcare, joint property, fuss-free inheritance and the right to form a secular, civilized union. ■

CONTACT Terry J. Allen at tallen@igc.org

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Fooled

Continued from back page

in the trade publication *Mar/Hedge*—headlined “Madoff tops charts; skeptics ask how”—quoted observers who were “baffled by the way the firm has obtained such consistent, nonvolatile results month after month and year after year.” The skeptics, it continued, “noted that others who use or have used [Madoff’s] same [investment] strategy ... are known to have had nowhere near the same degree of success.”

That naturally leads to the question: If it was widely known that something was fishy about Madoff’s fund, how did it continue to draw investors? The answer, according to the financial blogger Henry Blodget, is that, “the smart money KNEW Bernie [Madoff] had to be cheating, because the returns he was generating were impossibly good. Many Wall Streeters suspected the wrong rigged game, though: They thought it was insider trading, not a Ponzi scheme. And here’s the best part: *That’s why they invested with him.*”

In *Fakers*, Maliszewski calls this dynamic the “unsuspecting collaboration between the con artist and the conned,” and it’s one of the main themes tying together the book’s disparate essays, interviews and profiles on hoaxers throughout history. Maliszewski is interested in the perpetrators, mechanics and purposes (sometimes noble, usually less so) of fraud, and examines them in fascinating detail. But he also notes that “with every story and every new hoax, [I became] more interested in the faked, in those who believed.”

Or, as he explains in creating an Aesopian-type fable about an art forgery scam (that could just as easily apply to the Madoff scandal):

One day, the crow set the foxes fighting for control of an apple. The apple, the crow swore, was unlike any other in the world, and the foxes chose to believe him. But the apple was really nothing special, and the crow, in the end, was found out and driven from the forest for its lies. But what of the foxes that desired blindly and wildly, and so were fooled? Should not they too learn a moral from such a story?

Maliszewski is careful to note, however, that while such wild and blind desire might be something of a constant in frauds across time, the object of that desire—and the ends to which the faker manipulates it—can vary from case to case. Indeed, the difference of those ends is what separates the mere fakers from those who Maliszewski endorses

ful hoax that the *New York Sun*—looking to increase its circulation—pulled on its readers in 1835, in which it soberly announced that an Edenic paradise on the moon (inhabited by strange creatures, living in blissful harmony) had been discovered via a powerful, new telescope. Part of the hoax’s success, Maliszewski notes, stemmed from the desires of *Sun*

‘The crow was found out and driven from the forest for its lies. But what of the foxes that desired blindly and wildly, and so were fooled? Should not they too learn a moral from the story?’

as the “great pretenders.”

To wit, in a shrewd chapter dissecting the fabrications of the notorious *New Republic* “journalist” Stephen Glass, Maliszewski skewers the widely held notion that Glass succeeded largely because he was “a brilliant storyteller ... [whose] articles burst with the sort of feverish, anxious invention that can sometimes seem like life.” Rather, Maliszewski demonstrates through close readings that Glass’ imagination was “crushingly banal” and that “his talent lay less in the originality of his imagination than in his solicitous ability to seize on whatever the conventionally wise were chatting about at cocktail parties and repackage it in bright new containers, selling the palaver right back to them.”

Ironically enough, that palaver often consisted of mocking various idealists for holding dissenting beliefs outside of the mainstream. The mockery, Maliszewski writes, “confirm[ed] the continued validity of his assumptions: the resistance remains small ... [and] the real business of politics marches on without them.” And thus, by flattering his editors’ and readers’ beliefs in themselves as wisened-up cynics, hip to the follies of marginal idealism, Glass exploited the naivety of their cynicism, playing them for fools.

Not, Maliszewski wisely cautions, that it is necessarily foolish to be fooled. In one chapter, he details the wildly success-

readers to escape the grim, painful realities of 1830s New York, which was beset by crime, poverty, inequality, disease and racial and religious strife. Their gullibility and optimism, Maliszewski writes, “may have excused—or made it all too simple to ignore—the squalid conditions in the country’s young cities and the looming political crisis over slavery, among many other wrongs in dire need of fixing.”

But Maliszewski refuses that sole reading. He recognizes that the New Yorkers’ optimism and belief in the outrageous story “might be understood instead as a critical impulse—call it a utopian urge ... to form in the future a society that more closely matches [the *Sun*’s] bucolic vision; to make lives better; and to improve, finally, on what is here and what is known for real.”

To rise to the status of a “great pretender,” one must combine this utopian urge to make lives better with a skeptical intelligence about the bedrock certainties of one’s own society. For Maliszewski, the model is, still, Jonathan Swift, whose satire, he writes, “doesn’t just entertain ... [but] reach[es] out to readers and demand[s] from them great intelligence and imagination and rigor.”

Fakers is a fine example of intelligence, imagination, and rigor, as well as a timely reminder that these qualities must always be used in tandem with hope, which, no matter how audacious, is necessary, but not sufficient. ■

WON'T GET FOOLED AGAIN

(Well ... maybe just one more time)



BY BRIAN COOK

IN DECEMBER, THE FINANCIAL world received its biggest shock yet, when Bernard Madoff, former Nasdaq chair and founder of Bernard L. Madoff Investment Securities, admitted to employees (and, presumably, to FBI agents who raided his offices the following day) that his hedge fund business was “just one big lie,” a “giant Ponzi scheme” that had lost an estimated \$50 billion in investments.

Among the numerous worthies taken in by Madoff’s scam were Oscar-winner Steven Spielberg, Nobel winner Elie Wiesel and publishing magnate Mort Zuckerman. Nonprofit institutions such as the Rokit Foundation and the JEHT Foundation, both large donors to civil rights organizations and other liberal causes, were so heavily invested with Madoff that they were

forced to close.
It is, of course, well and good that Madoff will be tried and, most likely, punished for this breathtaking fraud. One also hopes Congress will make heads roll at the somnambulant Securities and Exchange Commission for its lax regulations that largely enabled the scam. But Paul Maliszewski’s excellent new book, *Fakers: Hoaxers, Con Artists, Counterfeiters, and Other Great Pretenders* (New Press, January)—written before the Madoff story broke—suggests that our search for accountability should not end there.

Consider that those working in the hedge fund industry had long held serious concerns over the performance of Madoff’s fund. Back in May 2001 (so, nearly eight years ago), an article

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